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"FROM THE PAINTING BY R. POTZELBERGER, BY PERMISSION OF THE BERLIN PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPANY, NEW YORK."

By

E. IRENÆUS STEVENSON

Author of

"White Cockades"

"Left to Themselves"

("Philip and Gerald")

"Mrs. Dee's Encore"

Etc.

AMERICAN PUBLISHERS CORPORATION

0-318 SIXTH AVENUE NEW YORK

E. IRENÆUS STEVENSON

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Matter of Temperament

Price, 50 Cents

American Publishers Corporation

Issued Fortnightly
Annual
Subscription, $1[illegible].0

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(JANUS)

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AUTHOR OF
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TO

S. D.

GRÄFIN VON —

WHOSE RIGHT TO A DEDICATION OF THE
FOLLOWING PAGES
THEIR AUTHOR FULLY RECOGNIZES
DESPITE THE FLIGHT OF MANY YEARS.

Press Notices of "Janus:, a Novel."

The New York Tribune.

—A story of love and music, the hero being a young German composer, who is snared by a beautiful and unprincipled woman. The seduction of the victim is described with power and effect, and the catastrophe is led up to and narrated with skill and strong dramatic force. The story is interesting and well-written.

Town Topics.

A book worth reading. The characters are well-drawn and consistently maintained throughout the work; while the plot, although seemingly it is about to verge on the erotic, never enters into that condemned region. * * * The work as a whole has charm.

The Christian Union (The Outlook).

* * * Mr. Stevenson's book does not attempt to answer the question of art's relation to morals by direct statement so much as by implication. It is true, there is a conversation in which that matter is broached and answered with brevity and directness. * * * But it is in the working out of the story that Mr. Stevenson attempts to answer the question by showing the moral instability of the artistic temperament, its sensitiveness on the side of the imagination and the emotions, its lack of poise and self-control. It would be idle to say that the story does not cover the whole ground, since the writer, probably, has no intention of doing anything more than pursue dramatically the working-out of certain temperaments. Artistically the author has succeeded in investing his story, brief as it is, with the atmosphere of the artistic temperament, and in tracing very clearly the inevitable moral evolution. It shows great cleverness, and a moral purpose none the less distinct because it deals with an immoral situation.

The Atlantic Monthly.

* * * Our interest in American fiction is independent of time, yet there is always a quickening of the pulse when we are contemplating not the revival of past achievements, but the promise of the future which lies in some slight present performance. * * * We will not sketch the plot, which is one of character working through incident (rather than of character revealing character) except to say that the leading person, a young musical genius, is awakened temporarily to a sense of the power which resides in a pure love, only to fall back and to have his life blackened by the insidious encroachment on his nature of the power of evil—resident in a false woman, and responded to by his one weakness. With the limitations of a sketch conceded, it is a strong piece of work. The mutations of Moritz Reisse's nature are not only truthful—they are portrayed with naturalness and without too much recourse to comment by the author. * * * The depth of Nadine Von Gravenhorst's intrigue is made very distinct; she is thoroughly explained, and explained by the course of the story. We are especially pleased with the reserve which the author shows in dealing with the moral, more specifically the musical, parts of the book. We are accustomed to a moony treatment of music and musicians in fiction that it is a relief to find the subject used as an art, and not as a sentiment. * * *

The Mail and Express.

* * * The author has handled a repulsive plot with force and delicacy, and his novel, is from a literary point of view, one of the most notable of recent issues in fiction. * * There is no straining for effect, yet the situations are intensely dramatic, and the closing scene of the domestic drama is thoroughly consistent and finely sustained. The character of Alexis is carefully studied, with a delicate sense of proportion, and the weakness of Moritz expresses itself naturally and logically. * * * It is a novel of more than ordinary interest.

Belford's Magazine.

* * * It is the work of a man of clear and delicate insight, fine attainments and much culture—a man who knows much of the literature and biography of music. * * * The descriptions throughout are powerfully written, and there are several dramatic passages which have rarely been equalled in recent fiction. The final interview between the injured husband and his guilty wife is a work of art, rounded and complete, with not a word or gesture too many or too few. This and several other portions of the book display real genius. * * * The characters are laid in with a few clever, but strong touches. We get a glimpse, among others, of the composer Meyerbeer, which however distasteful to lovers of Meyerbeer's music is unquestionably accurate. The story exhibits great care and solicitude —a book for grown men and women, a book to make a deep impression and to be long remembered. * * *

The Musical Times (London).

* * * In the volume before us, we have the spectacle of a powerfully written and engrossing romance. * * an impeachment of the morality of art in general and music in particular. * * * It abounds in strong situations, which are handled with success. The dialogue is bright and pointed, and the characters are clearly drawn. It is * * * a novel wholly free from the unwholesome excresences which are now-a-days paraded out of an alleged devotion to realism. * *

The Independent.

* * * A story of sustained and most painful interest. The scene of Mr. Stevenson's book is a German city, the identity of which is concealed under an initial. The epoch is the middle of the present century, when Meyerbeer's influence and success were making a deep impression on the composers of the school of Germany; and Meyerbeer himself is encountered for a few moments in the beginning of the novel—the rehearsal of an opera "Prinx Max," the work of a young composer "Moritz," who may and may not be an altogether imaginary person. The book is a sketch, but more than sufficient. It is a terrible moral tragedy.

PREFACE.

The present edition of "A Matter of Temperament" (originally published in 1889 under the title "Janus") is from the plates of the first edition. Only a limited revision of them has proved practicable. The author would gladly re-write the sketch from beginning to end: but such kindness to its literary technique must be postponed. The novelette was put together hurriedly—in course of a few weeks—many years ago; partially written in another language, finally completed in English. The kindness of its early reception in the United States and in England has been a matter of much pleasure to the author. In the present edition it has been possible to do little more than correct in the plates errors in actual proofreading, and to remedy sundry omissions of the manuscript.

E. I. S.

New York City, September, 1896.

"The difficulty with the question is that, like a statue of Janus, it presents two faces, in a peculiarly uncompromising manner—an agreeable theory and a painful fact; too few people who stand at one angle and study and descant, will shift their ground and study the other aspect."—*Alexis von Gravenhorst.*

JANUS.

CHAPTER I.

"She hath directed
How I shall take her from her father's house."
Merchant of Venice.

On a damp May night, in the year 185—, a pair of dark horses, attached to a modest close carriage, waited, with much stamping of hoofs and champing of bits, in a narrow and unpaved street in a suburb of Milan. The coachman seemed half out of humor at the delay in his master's reappearance, and muttered sundry Italian oaths. The street might almost have been called a lane, for it was bordered with trees and led from a quiet avenue directly toward one of the rural roads. There were no lamps in it so far out as where the carriage had halted. Stationed in the densest shadow of the trees, the vehicle's own lamps were unlighted. One of the distant clocks nearer the centre of the city had just struck eleven.

The carriage almost touched, on its right, a brick wall. This wall was pierced by a gate. The gate let one into a deep garden, that daylight showed to be more or less weeds and ruin, crack-nosed Italian misconceptions of gods and goddesses, fountains that trickled instead of spouting, and battered rococo arbors. Following the path suggested by

the gate, and hurrying across the garden, one came to the Villa Fioraja itself, long since rented from season to season, and sheltering Jew or Greek, British tourist or Parisian bankrupt, as chance and the real-estate agents might have it. The distance of the villa from the centre of the capital kept it empty much of the year. Just at present it was leased for six months to an Austrian, Count von Lillienberg. Upon this murky spring night it loomed up at the far end of the long garden, with five or six of its windows twinkling some definition of its extent.

That same afternoon, its lessee, Count von Lillienberg, had gone to Turin to remain some days. His had been a busy life and full of coincidences. But the occasion of this journey presented a peculiarly important coincidence, in that this very evening had been chosen by his only daughter, Nadine von Lillienberg, whose beauty and accomplishments were pretty generally talked about in certain social circles of the town, for her elopement and marriage with a young man who was just then conspicuously before the artistic public of Milan—Moritz Reisse, of Munich, musician and composer. It was Herr Reisse's carriage which waited the romantic pair of young people, and it was Reisse himself who at this moment was hurrying as fast as he could, tumbling over loose tiles and broken roots, toward the east wing of the villa, where Nadine von Lillienberg's maid would give his impatient feet entrance.

About these three persons—Count Wilhelm von Lillienberg, Nadine, and Moritz Reisse—there had been more gossip in Milan for the past two months than on any other topic. Fortunately, the depth and precipitancy of the love affair between the young people, so far, had not been part of the commentary. Gossip, however, is scarcely the word to describe the *éclat* attending the advent of Reisse—

a young Bavarian operatic writer, whose success, youth, physical attractions, and friendship with Meyerbeer at once opened to him the most exclusive doors in the place, and favored him with such further flatteries as his present fortunes invited. Of the young man's birth little was known, or indeed asked, by his admirers—in fact, nothing was asserted of him except that he was the son of an obscure Munich musician, that he worked his way up into German popularity with some clever operettas, then won success with a grand opera, and, lastly, came to Milan on the invitation of a manager to superintend the production of a new work, which, like himself, was already vastly admired in the Italian city. His airs were whistled everywhere. He himself was made one of the drawing-room darlings of the season. So much for Moritz Reisse.

With the von Lillienbergs it was quite another matter. For some twenty years Count Wilhelm had been an unfailing subject of scandal to certain capitals and summer-resorts of the Continent. It was Milan's turn with him now. This turn was especially piquant in that, for the first time in his wanderings, Count von Lillienberg's daughter accompanied her father. She had lived with some Northern relatives since quitting her convent school. Count von Lillienberg looked upwards of fifty. He was tall, grizzled, and dignified in his manners. His family connections were undoubtedly high. His social good name and means of subsistence were growing worse and worse each year. He had long since played at ducks and drakes with a very tolerable fortune; and that his skill at cards had a good deal to do with his keeping up any establishment, or his migratory way of life, many unlucky persons had ruefully found out. Milan was now just about making up its mind that he was a *chevalier d'industrie*, and little by little

gathering his past records for shocked examination. The final touch was added in the report that Count Wilhelm was now making the rounds of such places as might still know so little of his checkered career as to give him a social foothold, with the determination of marrying his aforesaid daughter to the richest *parti* practicable. Of the girl herself—she was little more than one—not an unkind whisper was current. She was singularly beautiful. Her face already showed a character full of self-control and of sorrowful experience. She sang admirably. Those who did not like her, pitied her. It was the old story of Angelica in her bonds awaiting the Orc.

Her Ruggiero sped amid the tangled shrubbery with his mind in a tumult of anxiety and delight. "I am earlier than she expects me," he thought; "perhaps I shall have to wait down in that chilly little porch for Lieschen. No —she will provide for that. Let me see, where did I put those railway-tickets? In the other pocket? Good! here they are; and the express starts at one-thirty for Genoa. She will surely be ready by this time, early as I am; and that fat little priest"—he had arranged for the marriage ceremony to take place a few moments after midnight in an obscure little church not far from the Villa Fioraja—"will not be kept long from his bed. Ah, my honored father-in-law that is to be!" he went on to himself, with a flash of disdain in his fine eyes, thrown away upon the darkness of the garden; "so you forbade me your threshold, did you? How little you suspected my audacity or Nadine's courage. You may be wise enough to win at your card-table, or clever enough to dupe society for a while, but you were not prudent enough to command your daughter's going with you when you left Milan to-day. Heavens, what a scandal there will be!" He smiled at his last reflection, then

darted under a roofless arbor and around a weed-grown crescent. Murmuring half aloud, "To Paradise—to Paradise," with a laugh at his lover-like folly, he ran up a flight of broken steps, and, without knocking, awaited some preconcerted next move. From the road one of the horses neighed. The young man's heart beat fast. As he peered from his coign of concealment, running his eye over the obscurities of the old garden and the rear façade of the villa, a light step began to come pit-pat down the staircase to the door. Moritz turned about, pressed closely against the jamb, and listened. The descending person gained the last of the flight within, and there paused on the other side of the door, as if awaiting some direct signal from him. He tapped lightly. A whisper filtered its way through the crack. "Yes, yes, it is I, Lieschen," he said, in chafing impatience; "don't be so long. Everything is all right." He trembled. Did any one else overhear? How slow Lieschen was!

Lieschen, a tall, raw-boned young woman, Nadine von Lillienberg's devoted handmaid, pulled the door ajar. Moritz slipped in and saw that she had brought a candle down with her. This she had prudently deposited on the stair, and against the light her angular figure stood out in silhouette.

"For goodness' sake, Lieschen," he exclaimed, "what did you bring that candle for? Surely I know my way in the dark, and you ought to also! I suppose that Komtess Nadine is nearly prepared—I will run up ahead of you. Oh, by-the-by," he added, still in a hurried whisper, "I may not have so good a chance again, Lieschen, to thank you for your help to us both, and to give you this. It will be luckier before than after the marriage, you know." He slipped some money into her hand,

and would have set his foot on the lowest stair. But the alert Lieschen intercepted his further progress.

"If you please, Herr Reisse, you are not to go up." Before the astonished young lover could more than repeat her words and give her a glance of bewilderment, she continued, "I brought the candle down so that you might read this letter and save trouble."

"Letter! What letter? A letter from —" He snatched it out of her careful hand. "From Komtess Nadine? Where is she? A letter!" He broke the seal. "She is not ill?"

"If you please, Herr Reisse, she has gone to Turin with her father."

Moritz Reisse's jaw fell, and his black eyes opened in such consternation that Lieschen, who was suspicious of the whole race of young men, in all walks of life, drew back.

A thousand unlovely thoughts coursed through Reisse's head during the second or so that he stood there fumbling the letter that Lieschen had given him—in his alarm at her last announcement. All had been discovered? Oh, cursed spite of fate! Just on the eve of their happiness, von Lillienberg's dull eye must have widely opened, and poor Nadine have been borne off Turinward, a weeping captive! Moritz felt like a prince whose fairy castle comes tumbling about his ears.

But when he tore open the letter and, leaning down to the dripping candle, began to read it, so curious an expression stole, with each line, over the young man's face, that Lieschen remarked it in the feeble and fluttering light. She watched him. He turned back—re-read—again re-read—dashed on into the second page—then seemed again to dissect the meaning, line by line. Once or twice he

looked up from the communication, as if its contents made him forget where he stood and what he did. He had grown pale when he finally turned to Lieschen, and seemed to control a violent agitation by so visible an effort that the grim servant exclaimed, "Herr Je!" under her breath.

Reisse was wordless for a few seconds. His lips trembled so that he could not speak. "Herr Je!" repeated Lieschen, still standing bolt upright with her lean arms folded.

"Do you know what is in this?" he asked, fiercely.

"I—I—that is, I suppose it is a note bidding Herr Reisse—good-night," stammered Lieschen.

He gave a bitter laugh.

"Yes, it is just that," he replied. "A note bidding Herr Reisse—good-night! Did you—but what folly to ask *you!*" he said, angrily, as to himself. He crumpled the letter tightly in his fingers.

"One moment," he added, sharply. "I will go upstairs after all. I have a reason. It is for the last time. Go before, with the light."

Lieschen was too nervous now to refuse. She piloted the young man upward. They crossed a corridor and then another; after which Moritz entered a large apartment, furnished rather sparsely but handsomely enough. A fire smouldered on the hearth. The room was half lighted, and the bed-chamber beyond, not more so. He could see everywhere signs of elaborate and hurried packing, doors opened, a litter of ribbons and discarded stuffs, French-heeled boots and worn slippers, *passées* gowns, and two or three broken trunk-trays. All was still, except a little sputter from the summer fire.

Moritz stood motionless in the centre of the apartment,

looking now on this, now on that side, at the disordered floor.

"Whose trunks are those?" he asked, curtly, pointing.

"Mine, Herr Reisse," replied Lieschen. "I am to despatch the rest of the things to-morrow, and join Komtess Nadine at Turin the day after. You did not know, then," she went on, with well-meant hypocrisy, "of Komtess Nadine's plan of going?"

"No!" the young man returned, in a stormily-inflected monosyllable. Lieschen looked like a frightened grenadier. Reisse gave a parting glance at the familiar furniture and littered floor, and, after it, seemed to recover a certain portion of needed self-control.

"Thank you, Lieschen," he said, more kindly; "I will go down now. I am glad I came up—very glad too, of this letter." He walked to the grate and put it to the embers and saw it burnt. "Good-night—and good-bye, as you say you are going to Turin, too. I have no message for Komtess Nadine."

He hurriedly left the room. Lieschen had hardly time to light him down the stairs. She heard him exclaim something as he opened the door at the foot and darted out into the night. The tone rang in her ears for days. Then she returned to the deserted chambers and, first of all, to the fireplace, where she proceeded to examine, on her knees, the relics of the enigmatical letter. But it was a pile of ashes. "What a pity!" she murmured; "I should have so liked to read it. All she told me was that she had of a sudden come to the conclusion that the wedding could not take place at present. H'm! she is a strange girl! I am glad that she has given me the green silk dressing-gown."

Meanwhile Moritz Reisse had walked stumblingly back to his carriage. The coachman looked sharply, and noticed

that he was alone. "To the church, signore?" he asked.

"To my own rooms," the bewildered lover said, angrily. "After that, you may go to the chapel and tell Father Cirilo that there will be no wedding to-night. Give him this." He handed the servant money and leaped into the carriage, adding, as he slammed the door, "Tell Father Cirilo I will see him to-morrow afternoon—to explain."

The horses set out at a quick trot toward the centre of the capital.

CHAPTER II.

"The actors are come hither my lord."
Hamlet.

On a warm Sunday evening in May, a few years after the event to which the preceding chapter has been devoted, a knot of chorus-singers, players in the orchestra, and minor actors of the B—— Hoftheater loitered about the stage door of that resort, grumbling over the special rehearsal on which the management had insisted. To the extreme distaste of the capital the Hoftheater had been closed for months, because of, first, a fire, and second, a death in the Ducal connection. But the announcement of a vigorous spring season, to be inaugurated with a new comic opera by Moritz Reisse, now arrived at the height of popularity in Germany, delighted the town. The advancement of art, and especially music, in his capital was a solicitude to His Highness, the Duke, and under his fostering care, B—— had become noised abroad as quite a theatrical and musical centre.

Pacing arm-in-arm slowly up and down the outside of the chatting groups (who were awaiting the advent of the manager and composer, after having themselves been duly recorded as present) were two young girls, unattended by any male cavalier, and apparently absorbed in one of those conversations which seem to be a great satisfaction in female friendships.

The elder of the two, Elsa Ehlert, was slender and dark-haired, and of a grave and thoughtful way of speech. Side-by-side with the plump, blond, and vivacious personality

of her companion, Bertha Grauschimmel, of the altos, the contrast between them was marked. A glance, too, at Elsa Ehlert's serious young face would have hinted that just at this particular moment only so much of Bertha's rattle was heard as might call forth a "yes" or "no" in the right place, and that the real, innermost Elsa was walking distant paths alone. Long years afterward one who had known Fräulein Ehlert from her youth up remarked that he always applied to her the lines:

> Thou hearest my voice. . .
> But, with mine, others that I cannot catch.

This was true of her all her famous life.

"So, you see, dear Elsa," Bertha was saying, with abundant temper in her blue eyes, "I have just fought, fought, *fought* with him—well—ever since! So provoking! Otto can be as nice as anyone if he likes! Now, shall I answer his letter at once, or wait?"

There was no reply. Bertha glanced around in sudden suspicion. "I do declare!" she exclaimed, in aggrievment, "you haven't heard a word I've been telling you! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Elsa, how can you tease a body so?" And the sprightly little Bertha administered a sharp pinch to her guilty confidante.

Elsa stammered out, "I beg your pardon, dear Bertha. Indeed, I did hear almost everything, and it is very interesting, I'm sure. I couldn't help my thoughts straying just that second or two. Please go on!"

"Please go on, indeed!" retorted Bertha, saucily. "Not I, truly! Look here, Elsa; when that sober, solemn lover of yours, Johann Steins, comes to sit of an evening with you, do you go wandering out of yourself a thousand miles or so? I hope he likes it, if you do!"

"I'm afraid I do wander sometimes," Elsa responded, frankly, recalling vague complaints of her patient betrothed.

"Then tell me, for pity's sake, what you fall to thinking about?" queried Bertha, pressing her friend's arm more closely, as they turned from the limit of their promenade. "Not about Steins, I'm sure?"

Elsa smiled—a sober, peculiar little smile, as if she felt the difficulty of answering Bertha to that thoughtless young woman's real information. "No," she said, gravely, "not at such times about Johann—fond as I am of him. There are so many things to come and go through one's head all the day long. Life seems such a strange thing to me, dear; more wonderful each week. I feel somehow as if all of mine that is worth living were yet to come. Besides, there is my music. 'Prinz Max' runs in my mind over and over again."

"Well, if *I* kept hearing tunes in my ears when there wasn't so much as a fiddle going in the street, I should certainly think my stomach was out of order. I'm sure I sing in the Hoftheater almost as much because I like singing as for the little money to be got by it; but directly I get inside the dressing-room again, catch me thinking twice about what we've been shouting upstairs! Oh, Elsa, you are a queer, a very queer girl, and no mistake! I believe that I don't half understand you yet. But"—and Bertha slipped her arm out from Elsa's that she might give the grave girl's waist an affectionate little squeeze—"you are certainly the dearest and best girl, too, that ever drew breath! Do you hear that?"

Before Elsa could answer, a severe but kindly old voice from behind interrupted: "Fräulein Ehlert is assuredly one of the best girls in the world; as for the queerness, that I don't know about."

The two friends turned. They recognized the stooping figure and whitened hair of old Anton Delié, for years the first 'cellist of the Hoftheater. The kindly old musician held out a hand to each, paternally. "Well, my children," he said, "how do you both relish losing your holiday evenings again? They are later, too, in getting to work than they ought to be."

"Do you know, Papa Delié," Elsa answered, raising her calm eyes to his, "I believe I had rather sing this music by Herr Reisse than do anything else."

"I'll wager that she cares a deal more for her singing, Papa Delié, than she does for anything else—even Herr Steins," quickly interrupted the mischievous Bertha, with whom Elsa's betrothal was a sore point.

"Perhaps I do," returned Elsa, seriously, meeting a look of warm sympathy in the old violoncellist's eyes—"perhaps I ought to. But, oh, Papa Delié," she continued, abruptly, as Bertha Grauschimmel spied a beckoning acquaintance and darted away to argue some pressing question with her, "I so wanted to ask you since the last rehearsal exactly what you think about young Herr Reisse's music. This 'Prinz Max' puzzles me terribly." She laughed gently.

"Certainly not to sing it? There is hardly a page of the choruses that should trouble you, my child."

"Oh no, not that," she answered, hesitatingly, "but—but it is something about the music itself when I hear it. I don't know that I can tell you just what it always seems to want, to me. It does want—*something*. It is all beautiful; but I can't help thinking when we are working at it that Herr Reisse does not really do himself justice in it. Do you? It never sounds to me like the kind of music that is sincere music—what a man writes because he can

not help writing it. 'Prinz Max' sounds to me, dear Papa Delié, like an opera that is made because a person tries to make it, not one that makes itself in Herr Reisse's mind first, and because he can't keep it out of him."

She stopped, looking intently into the old man's face, with heightened color and shining eyes. Bertha would not have complained now that her friend was in any divided state of being.

To Delié, who had taught Elsa from her childhood, himself a musician of singularly educated perceptions, in spite of his present modest position in his art, there was always a wonderful charm in watching how this girl's fresh intuitions asserted themselves. Her insight into the genuinely great, her unerring divination of the false or flippant, delighted him. The young singer's mind seemed to him a balance in which she unconsciously weighed every day and hour what concerned her beloved music. The scale invariably fell true.

He looked affectionately at her, and nodded his white head. "Your heart is a sound tutor, my dear," he replied. "Herr Reisse has, I think, yet to meet his inspiration. In this work there is much that shows what he will do; let him meet it. Then, be it a love, a grief, a hate, a joy, why then, *when* this inspiration does come to him, it will be like dipping his pen in fire—mark my words."

"Perhaps he has lost this—inspiration," Elsa said, gravely.

"Found then, or first greeted, 'Prinz Max' will be dross compared with what Herr Moritz Reisse will give to the world—in days when Fräulein Elsa Ehlert is walking the great stages of Europe as the famous singer of her time."

The girl blushed and shook her head. Delié involun-

tarily thought of her : so young, so lofty in her aspirations so talented, and as yet so obscure. "And therefore hidden from all the evil that may be lying in wait for such a spirit ; from pain that is its penalty for so keenly feeling," he added, in his heart. The girl stood tranquilly, absorbed in her own imaginings. The loving old man reached forward and took her slender hand in his own and kissed it. "God give to thee forever a joyful heart as well as a great name!" he said, almost with a sigh. He released her fingers and turned to Bertha Grauschimmel, who ran up to them laughing over some victory which her sharp tongue had just achieved.

It was lucky that Bertha's appearance made a slight interruption. Otherwise an unseen listener to the last half of the conversation between Delié and Elsa Ehlert might have failed in making good his concealed escape. The passage to the stage was dark enough to hide any person who stood within its narrow doorway, immediately outside of which Elsa and Delié had paused. A young man, straight-backed and vigorous, of some twenty-seven years, clad in a trimly fitting black suit, slipped away into the theatre as fast as he could, with a mortified expression on his face, and knocking over a broom and an empty box as he vanished. It was Moritz Reisse, a trifle older than during that season in Milan. He had entered the Hoftheater by the front, and was hurrying out, with his usual light step, to beg the orchestra to follow him at once, when the sound of his own name from Elsa Ehlert's and Delié's lips checked him into motionless eavesdropping.

He had no time to indulge in any reflections, for the long-expected manager, Rödel (who was kindly doing duty as chorus-master owing to the desertion of that functionary) and Fräulein Topp, the leading soprano, came breath-

lessly up the street. The entire group began hurrying with them into the theatre, where Moritz had already seated himself in his conductor's chair. The stage was lit with a few flaring gas jets. A half-dozen carpenters were adjusting some indispensable pieces of the first scene of "Prinz Max." Beyond loomed up cavernously the black abyss of the empty auditorium.

"Clear the stage there—all!" the indefatigable Stage-manager Urach was proclaiming. "Courtiers, you stand more to the left—that's it! Ladies, fall back a little to the right—not in such close knots! That's better."

Moritz's eye had already singled out his untutored critic, Elsa Ehlert, as she stood among the sopranos, to whom indeed her rich voice and certain attack were a sheet-anchor in dangerous moments. He had marked Elsa before, as some one more or less detached from the Gretchens and Kätchens about her, although he individualized her only as a young woman of obviously better breeding than her companions, and for some mysterious reason a *protégée* of Joachim Rödel. But now, in spite of the pique to his vanity her words had offered, he studied anew the passionless sweetness of her profile as she bent over a music-page a friend held up to her. He said to himself, with sudden appreciativeness, "My faith, you may take a great deal upon yourself, my fair young lady! But you are surprisingly beautiful, as likely you know."

"Herr Reisse, Herr Reisse! All right—we are ready when you are!" came Stage-manager Urach's sharp voice, cutting short Moritz's cogitations. "Fräulein Topp, please be good enough to recollect that you and Herr Silbersteim must *not* lean so affectionately on the rail of that summer-house in Act One; if you do, down you will both go, I warn you." (Here a suppressed titter among the chorus,

as Fräulein Topp's weight was generous.) "Now, ladies and gentlemen," cried Moritz, looking about him for the last time, "be ready to begin the instant the introduction ends;" and thereupon the first chords of the spirited little prelude of "Prinz Max" awoke the echoes of the Hof-theater. The firm hand and supple wrist of the conductor flashed the white baton in quick curves above Moritz's shoulder and head. Violin and oboe and horn were prompt to catch his warning glance and come in manfully with the beat. The charm of Reisse's features as he directed was doubled by that look that one is sometimes lucky enough to catch on the face of some orchestra leader to-day—the expression of the artist absorbed as to every fibre in unfolding his message of art.

But the message did not go smoothly. As the finale of the act drew near, vulgarly speaking, a neck-and-neck race began between principals, chorus, and orchestra. Presently everything came to a stand-still, with Rödel lecturing the tenors, and Reisse admonishing Fräulein Topp and Herr Silbersteim. "Oh dear, oh dear, what shall we do by Sunday, if you can't remember better than this what you're told?" rose Rödel's pathetic complaint, as he darted up and down among the derelict. "It is *allegretto*, not *allegro!* You just go galloping along like a lot of post-horses! Now, once again! Go ahead, Herr Reisse!"

Just as the tricky passage was being again given forth lustily and smoothly enough to lure the Heimdall-eared Rödel into an approving nod, Elsa Ehlert noticed a door opening and shutting at the distant end of the auditorium. A gas-burner sparkled out. By its aid, a couple of gentlemen cautiously effected a descent toward the stage, and with the last note of the finale, came forth from the darkness, clapping their hands loudly. One seemed an elderly man, of

small stature, wrapped in a fur-lined surtout and of an unmistakably Israelitish cast of features. The other was a strikingly handsome blond man of thirty, with a bright, good-humored face; immediately recognized by Elsa as Count Alexis von Gravenhorst, the son of a wealthy and titled banker of B——, lately deceased. Count Alexis was joint owner of the Hoftheater with the Duke, and a great friend also of Moritz Reisse. In fact, he had suggested to Rödel, Moritz's advent to B——.

But great was Elsa Ehlert's surprise to see the deference with which both Joachim Rödel and Herr Reisse now saluted the young banker's Jewish friend. Low were the bows and cordial the greetings. She understood the mystery when she heard affable Rödel saying — "Arranged with the greatest difficulty, I assure you. My chorus-master has run away; and you know, my most respected Herr Meyerbeer—" The little Jew, with the hook nose and withered little hands, that looked as if fingering velvet or satin in a shop might be their normal employment, was Meyerbeer—Meyerbeer, then reigning as the king of lyric music in Italy and Germany, as his friend Rossini had reigned just before him. Elsa Ehlert looked at the unimposing, indeed commonplace figure, and studied the impassive round face almost with incredulity—certainly in disappointment. Had this man put upon music-paper such an episode as the Benediction of the Daggers?—or from behind that calm forehead had there come any such duet as "Oh, ciel! ou courez vous?"—and all the power and passion of that famous fourth act of "The Huguenots"?

"Well, and what have you been about now?" the great-little man was presently saying to Reisse, still his pet, if not his pupil. "What I just heard was not bad, not at all bad—although I think you might gain a bit in effect

in one place, I forget just where. Let me see your score a moment."

Moritz obediently reached down the bulky manuscript. His former instructor began skimming through its pages, pausing here and there and occasionally taking the liberty of making a correction with his ready pencil. He kept up a characteristic running commentary all the while. "So!—that is excellent—I would not have given the clarionets the melody there—Lord! my child, you haven't any business with such doings as *this!*—your effect is spoiled there; and do, for goodness' sake, recollect that effect in music is absolutely everything—what does the second horn say to *that* third measure?—nobody but a man of *my* teaching would ever have brought in the drums in that way, you clever-head!"—and so on, until Count von Gravenhorst came up to cut short a monologue, under which, with its pencil obligato, and in the presence of his orchestra, Moritz was waxing nervous enough.

"Come, my dear Herr Meyerbeer, we must be off!" von Gravenhorst exclaimed, heartily. "*Auf wiedersehen*, Reisse; and make your plans for coming up to Gravenhorst Lodge the first moment that all this musical work will permit you. My wife is looking forward with great pleasure to your acquaintance, and we propose to keep you with us all summer."

"You will be here in time for the first notes on Sunday night?" asked Moritz, smilingly. "I do hope that nothing will go wrong between now and then. May I look for you?"

"Certainly," returned Alexis von Gravenhorst, "and for my wife, too. You know which my box is—the upper one yonder. Farewell, till Sunday."

Von Gravenhorst took Herr Meyerbeer's arm and drew

the intent composer's eye from those pages of "Prinz Max." But, alas! as he yielded the score into Reisse's hand, the author of "Les Huguenots" and "Le Prophète" turned and, unasked, whispered in his *protégé's* ear a sentence or two which covered Moritz's face with a blush of mortification: "A clever thing, my dear child, but still not more than half worthy of your talents. Try again, with something that will give you more inspiration than this seems to have done. You can *grind out* four or five such works as this in a year!"

Having uttered which laconic speech very good-naturedly, Herr Meyerbeer departed with the Count, escorted by Herr Rödel, and amid a burst of applause from the gazing musicians, which he courteously acknowledged.

Luckless Moritz! Wounded in *amour propre*, of which he had a plentiful supply, first by a thorn-prick from a wild rose, and now by this arrow from a master hand! What could he do but scramble back into his chair with a red flush upon his olive cheek and mutter an angry ejaculation? The rehearsal proceeded, and very satisfactorily; but the tuneful numbers gave him no pleasure. To be told twice in one night that "Prinz Max" was a waste of his talent, a stop-gap! His wrath burned quite as hotly against Elsa Ehlert as against his critical teacher. Elsa was the bird in the hand that was to be punished instead of a dozen Herr Meyerbeers in the bush; and chance presently gave him an opportunity of revenging his piqued self that in a cooler moment he would have carelessly dismissed.

The rehearsal came to a surprisingly brilliant close with the delightful Hochzeit-Marsch, and singers and orchestra at once began running off, wrapping up throats, slipping

instruments into cases, and exchanging a few parting comments.

Reisse walked across the stage to proffer his arm to Fräulein Topp. He passed close beside Elsa Ehlert, Bertha Grauschimmel, and two or three other members of the female chorus. They bowed. He doffed his hat ceremoniously and said with vindictive sweetness and a meaning glance at Elsa, "Thanks, Fräulein Ehlert! thanks, Fräulein Grauschimmel! for your kind justice to the 'Prinz Max' to-night—especially if any of you may be pleased to consider it as music that is not sincere music, or not of the kind that makes itself because one cannot help writing it. Good evening, ladies!" which Parthian shaft having been let fly with a smiling countenance, Moritz quitted the Hoftheater, with Fräulein Topp appendant.

Elsa Ehlert flushed burning red. She opened her mouth, as if to make some rejoinder, and then, overcome with mortification at the discovery that her conversation had been overheard, turned away from Bertha and the rest as quickly as she could. They, fortunately, only half caught or half understood Herr Reisse's speech, and simpered him adieu, in pleasure at what they took for some high-flown compliment. Elsa looked about in helpless misery for Delié but he had departed, so controlling her anger as well as she could, she mutely accepted Bertha's proffered arm to walk homeward with the party, too vexed at herself to utter a needless word until they left her at her doorstep.

CHAPTER III.

"I hold you as a thing enskyed and sainted,
And to be talked with in sincerity,
As with a saint."—*Measure for Measure.*

"WELL, *I* never heard anything more impudent, I'm sure!" asserted Bertha, as she sat in Elsa's sunshiny little kitchen the next morning, having listened with wide-open eyes and ears to Elsa's confession. "The idea of his daring to say such a nasty thing. I thought it was queer he came so out of his way and made that long speech to you and Marianne and me. My goodness! I wish it had been me he aimed at! I'd have given him back a good word for himself! I'm not Bertha Leopoldine Maria Grauschimmel for nothing!"

"What must he think of me?" returned Elsa. "A dreadfully presuming, conceited girl, I'm sure, to dare to pull to pieces his opera, just as if I knew more than a professor! I wonder if he heard every word that I said?"

"You may guess he did," replied Bertha, contemptuously; "those black-eyed, black-haired people are the worst sneaks to listen, composers or what-not! Wouldn't I like to tell him what I think of eavesdroppers, gentle or simple! And to make you feel so badly, too, you poor dear!"

"I don't feel as if I could face him again," murmured Elsa, with the mocking words and pointed salute and ironical smile recurring to her. "He must despise me for an out-and-out fool." The young girl deluged the canary with seed in her bitterness of spirit, though she laughed.

"Look here, Elsa," said Bertha, rising from her stool,

for the conversation had been pretty well prolonged between the two girls; "it seems to me that you are a good deal more put out at having"—and here Bertha began smiling mischievously and cast a prudent eye toward the open street door as if hasty escape might be desirable—"at having offended this awfully good-looking and young and soft-voiced Herr Moritz Reisse than you would be if he were gray-haired and bent double and an old fellow, like Herr Meyerbeer. I've seen it in your eyes for a week, my dear, and if I were Johann Steins, I would —oh, my goodness, don't look at me so savagely! good morning, *good* morning!" Gathering her petticoats about her and giggling at her own insinuation Bertha made a nimble exit, leaving Elsa standing in the middle of the floor with the frown still on her broad, white brow, which her irrepressible friend's banter had suddenly brought up.

"Good-looking! young!" she repeated to herself scornfully. "As if I cared a pin for his fine eyes and his fine voice!—or for anything except having seemed a silly and talkative girl to a—well—a musician of talent! But what is the use of crying about what cannot be helped now? Since he overheard, why, there is no more to be said. The best thing I can do, now that the house is settled, is to go out and get a little air in the Park until it is time for father's dinner, and put Herr Moritz Reisse, composer, out of my head!"

She kissed the old man gently, as he sat half-slumbering over a book in his arm-chair, and taking her hat from its peg left the house. On the way to the Park she stopped and begged the company of the little child of a neighbor, who trotted along by her side in great contentment; and the two presently entered one of the quiet, sunny alleys of the Augusta Garten.

The midday air was full of the delightful languor of the early year-time. The broad stretches of fresh green and the patches of golden sunlight on the gravel made pleasant vistas, as holding small Sepperl's hand, she passed abstractedly onward, with her head bent down beneath her overhanging hat-brim. There were few people in the Augusta. She went to a bench and sat down to let her thoughts wander dreamily in pleasanter directions than "Prinz Max" or its writer, and was just relieved of that incubus when she suddenly discovered that Sepperl had slyly disappeared.

With visions of the Lake terrifying her, Elsa sprang to her feet, to be as quickly reassured when through the trees she saw the truant approaching her led, by a tall gentleman. One emotion gave place to another, when Sepperl and his guardian turned the corner at her shoulder.

"Good morning, Fräulein Ehlert," Moritz Reisse began, awkwardly. "Permit me to—to return to you your little friend that I found making for the swans yonder as fast as his legs could carry him."

Elsa looked up and murmured some embarrassed thanks, with a flush still on her cheeks. Sepperl came to the rescue of the situation.

"He is a very nice man," began this unobserving little person. "He has been telling me two *such* funny stories as we came back to you." Then, turning to Moritz, "You'd better sit right down here on this bench and tell me two or three more. Won't you?"

Between feeling thoroughly vexed over a trifle and laughing at it there is often a narrow line. Moritz leaned over Sepperl and, looking slyly at Elsa, replied, "My dear little fellow, I should like to; but I am afraid that this young lady would say that my story lacked inspiration and did

not make itself. Or would you not be again so cruel, Fräulein Ehlert?" Elsa ventured to meet his eyes. They were brimful of mirth. The tone of his "beautiful voice" was full of a very boyish fun. She could not help smiling. Moritz burst into a peal of laughter. Elsa joined in it. Pique flew off for good in that swift reconciliation.

"I was insufferably rude to do what I did, Fräulein Ehlert," began Moritz, when he had recovered his composure.

Sepperl put out his small hand, and the young man allowed himself to be drawn to a seat on the bench. "I was angry enough myself for eavesdropping. Upon my honor, though, that was accidental! And alas, Fräulein! what you said was endorsed by Herr Meyerbeer's last words to me. I lost my temper between you all."

"What must you have thought of me, Herr Reisse?" Elsa exclaimed in turn. "Who am I, a girl in your chorus, that I should turn a critic? Though, all the same," she added, mischievously, as she met his amused look, and gathered courage, "I—I can't help thinking that I—that is, we—were right in thinking what we did."

"Of course you were," he replied, good-humoredly; "I agree with you in every syllable. Depend upon it, Fräulein, you shall have better music from me some day than 'Prinz Max.' Ah, such words as yours ought to awaken any man to redeeming his indolence and serving his art better!"

She studied the ground in confusion and pleasure at his frankness.

"But pray tell me, Fräulein Ehlert," Moritz continued eagerly, "what and who are you, after all? I begin to suspect you of being a disguised somebody very great

indeed. What is this mystery between our good Manager Rödel and you? How comes it, that you are only one of his chorus-singers, when I am sure that——"

"There is no mystery about me, Herr Reisse," she answered, smiling at his fanciful idea. "I am in the chorus that I may earn a little and learn a little, and, above all, wait for my chance to begin harder work."

"Forgive what seems idle curiosity," he answered. "It is not such. Tell me of your plans, Fräulein, I beg. Perhaps I can help you."

Forgetting alike all her recent animosity and their brief acquaintance, Elsa did not shrink from confiding to the intent, courteous composer the few facts of her simple history. It was a not uncommon story of poverty; of aspirations to achieve a position in her musical life; of the kindness of Joachim Rödel and Anton Delié, who had together brought her and her father from Berlin to B——, where Manager Rödel had hoped at once to install Elsa in the position in his theatre of which her patient study made her already more than capable. But the Duke's championship of Fräulein Topp interfering, the watchful but discreet Rödel was obliged to keep his pet more or less hidden in the obscurity of the chorus or minor rôles, until he could get the lucky chance to bring Elsa before the public's notice.

All this did Moritz draw from Elsa Ehlert as they sat there with the little Sepperl between them, that bright morning. The young man listened and talked, spell-bound, fascinated. Not such had been the women he had been most accustomed to meet hitherto. In Elsa the woman was lost in the artist. Her whole individuality put to instant rout any irreverent thought, the shadow of an unworthy association. He listened to her as to a new creation in her race, and the spell of her high aim stole

upon him imperceptibly. On her part, Elsa felt no distrust of her polite auditor; neither did she, until after an hour had sped, reflect upon the oddity of her sitting there with him in the quiet Augusta, while they conversed together. The friendship between these two, who apparently had so little in common except art, was begun by the decree of fate.

A clock chimed. Elsa started up in embarrassed surprise.

"Try not to judge my unlucky 'Prince Max' too harshly, Fräulein," he besought her, laughing.

"I do not really know it well enough for that," she returned, pleasantly, "and you are very good to excuse my prejudice."

"You say that you would like to look over the soprano rôle in it that Fräulein Topp has captured. Suppose, then, that you give me the pleasure of dropping in with Herr Rödel this afternoon or to-morrow, with the opera under my arm, and we can glance through it together. Perhaps you may find something better to your liking, and my artistic character may redeem itself a degree or two. Besides that, there is some other music of mine, a song here, an aria there, which I should like you to try over with me. May Herr Rödel bring me?" he concluded, quizzically.

"Herr Rödel may bring you," she replied, hesitatingly; "my father, too, will be glad to see you."

Half-ashamed of her frank permission, but not sorry at its being given, Elsa hurried away with Sepperl. Moritz stood to watch her tall, graceful figure as it passed out of sight: then with a sigh he sank back on the bench, which seemed curiously deserted-looking.

"What a gentle, simple creature! How unaffected and guileless!" he exclaimed to himself. "I believed that such existed only in romances and poems. To even the

most confirmed rake it is, I suppose, decreed to meet some such charming Dorothea whom he must simply bow down to and respect with all his soul, and feel his very being all at once turned against Undine and Venus! Happy the honest man who—" and here his musings became of a sort decidedly novel to his head. Presently, too, something she had said about his music slipped into his mind. "Upon my word, I believe that I never wrote so well as when I was in love, and fool enough to fancy myself loved! If love be the 'inspiration' to lift me aloft in my art, I have known it and lost it forever. *Dio!* Where is she now, I wonder? Not yet altogether out of my thoughts, that is certain! What a contrast between such a woman and this enchantingly sincere, grave creature! It takes all sorts to make a world! It does indeed!"

When he got to his room that afternoon the first thing he did was to sit down to his piano and write smilingly a "*Du bist wie eine Blume,*" for which Schumann or Rubinstein might have been willing to exchange theirs.

He did go to the small house in Brieftaubestrasse that very next afternoon. Excellent Rödel knocked his glasses down on his nose and sharply surveyed the composer when he spoke of going with him.

"H'm, h'm," he finally grunted. "I don't know about this! What tricks are you up to now, Herr Composer? Remember, I don't fancy any that will mean a shadow's worth of mischief to Elsa Ehlert—no, no! I don't trust you good-for-naught, good-looking young music-makers, with your black eyes and dulcet tones. You'd much better stay at home. Go and spend the afternoon with Countess this or Baroness that. You can't hurt *them*, you know."

"But, Herr Rödel," pleaded Reisse, part in vexation and part in laughter, "I was asked to come. I swear to you

I will behave myself beautifully, so long as I have the luck of the girl's acquaintance! Truly and sincerely! Come, now, be amiable and let us set out together, for I protest I must go without you if you decline."

Rödel grumblingly assented, saying,

"Well, so be it! But I shall keep my eye upon you. And, above all, remember that Fräulein Elsa is betrothed, as a matter of family convenience, to a very respectable, sober-minded young attorney here in the town. He never interferes with her artistic doings or acquaintances, and keeps himself suitably in the background, but will not like his sweetheart to form too platonic a friendship with you. I have no idea that it would break her heart if she suddenly found out that she did not want to marry him. In fact, I don't think she has ever fallen in love with Herr Steins, or anything except her dear profession. But if you go to work to give my little girl any instructions in love, you may get your curly head cracked, my lad. Look out!"

The first call made, it is not surprising that, in spite of all the hurry and worry to be got through with before the eventful Sunday night that was to hear "Prinz Max" produced, Moritz found his way in the same direction two or three times. With each hour did Elsa Ehlert's influence descend like the gentle rain from heaven upon him. As for her, she knew not that her feet had passed through an invisible gate, and that a new world, which was the old, lay before her. Moritz left his precious duplicate score of the "Prinz Max" with her, and she sat and sang it over, until she began to know it by heart; but there often came a cadence into her voice which meant that that heart was either just going to sleep or just waking up. Which?

CHAPTER IV.

"The playhouse now, there must you sit."
K. Henry IV.
"Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered."
Cymbeline.

A QUARTER to six o'clock Sunday night, in the B—— Hoftheater! For half an hour parquet and boxes and galleries had been besieged. Behind the great curtain, where the colorful initial scene of "Prinz Max" was set, there reigned endless confusion.

The chorus were in full attire. Stage-manager Urach, red with excitement, darted about, enjoining and disposing. The thirty *danseuses* of the incidental ballet were grouped in a rouged, bespangled parterre of simpering complacency. Gas-men and property-men, all the functionaries of a night's representation were calling, hammering, and running. Joachim Rödel, despite responsibilities, seemed in great spirits.

Downstairs in the greenroom, a little later, there was more anxiety, if less bewilderment. Reisse, in his evening dress, finally found a moment to sit down in a corner and make a trifling alteration in one of the orchestral parts. Suddenly a matter yet neglected occurred to him. A call-boy was despatched to Fräulein Topp with a question. Fritz returned with the announcement that the dressing-room was vacant. The lady had not yet arrived.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Moritz, upstarting, "not here yet? It is two minutes to six! I will run up to

the stage. There is some mistake. She must be there."

He mounted the narrow flight three steps at a time, hurrying past Elsa Elhert at the top, merely pausing long enough to exchange a hand-clasp with his friend and accept her kind wishes for the thorough success of his new opera. He ran on, looking to right and left for the ample form of the missing prima donna in her purple and yellow gear.

He nearly stumbled over Rödel, who had paused to peep through the spy-hole in the curtain.

"Behold!" exclaimed the manager, dramatically.

Moritz put his eye to the chink. The Hoftheater was truly an inspiringly brilliant sight, with its fresh decorations, the lustre of diamonds, and the gay toilettes; the blaze of the central chandelier falling over a horseshoe of the beauty and wealth and rank of the capital. On the left, the Ducal box, yet empty, bore its stately insignia of flags and wreaths. In ten minutes the theatre would be a crush.

"Where, in the name of goodness, is Topp?" said Moritz, remembering himself suddenly.

"Topp?" quoth Rödel. "Why yonder she stands—no, below stairs, they told me! Why? Everything is all right. She said that—"

"Topp is *not* downstairs. She has not come, Rödel. I don't see where she can be. I am horribly afraid something is wrong!" Moritz exclaimed, in increasing apprehension.

Rödel started. "You don't mean it?" he returned. "Aren't you mistaken? It will be time for you to begin in fifteen minutes. I told her expressly to be here a little early. Stay here a second, Reisse; I'll find her for you."

Rödel hurried away. Back he came directly, however,

with a furious face. "By the Lord, Reisse, you are right! Something evil is to pay. But don't let a soul about us suspect. Engel, Engel," the upset manager called to a trusty squire within earshot, "put on your hat, run at once as fast as your legs will carry you and see if Fräulein Topp is anywhere downstairs; and if she isn't, make for her lodgings at No. 21, and tell her to come to the theatre at once. Keep your mouth shut on the way."

The discreet Engel ran off like an arrow.

"You do not imagine any serious detention, do you?" inquired Moritz, feeling now exceedingly uncomfortable.

"I only know that Topp is a woman— and an actress; and that this curtain ought to go up very, very soon," responded Rödel, grimly, consulting his watch nervously.

But Rödel had scarcely put his watch into his waistcoat pocket before Engel reappeared. He beckoned the manager and Moritz Reisse further into the shadow. A stranger, who for thinness and tallness might have rivalled Rödel himself, stood waiting.

"Manager Rödel, I believe?" queried this new-comer, stiffly.

"Your servant, sir."

"I am Physician Schoenıng. I met this gentleman at the rear door. I had come to tell you that Fräulein Topp—"

"Go on, for God's sake!" cried Rödel.

—"In getting into her carriage ten minutes ago suffered an apoplectic fit. It is impossible that she should recover for some hours. I will make you out the proper certificate for her at once, if you desire."

Rödel started back, paler in an instant than Engel. A thunderbolt had descended upon him. "Do you know what you are saying?" he faltered. "Fräulein Helene Topp

ill? Apoplexy? Humbug! She must come here at once —at once. Engel, run you—"

"Fräulein Topp is quite unconscious, Herr Manager," interrupted the physician. "It may be hours before she is restored. Her condition is dangerous."

There was no use in further contravening the fiat. Terrible visions flashed through Rödel's mind now, until he well-nigh sank under them—a clamorous and disappointed house—the vexation of the Duke—and the extinguishment in gasless gloom of all the *éclat* attendant upon the expected first production of the "Prinz Max." He fairly tottered as he turned to Reisse and exclaimed in absolute anguish, "We are lost—lost!"

But from the first second in which Moritz grasped the calamity, he was conscious of that curious sensation which most of us have experienced under, it is to be hoped, less weighty disasters—that all this had been gone through with somehow at some time before. The wild resort and daring remedy appeared to have been foreseen.

He slipped his arm through the unfortunate Rödel's to restrain his betraying the intelligence to the other persons so closely watching them, and asked, tremblingly: "This is absolutely the case, Physician Schoening?"

"Absolutely," answered the impassive doctor. "I scarcely saw proper measures begun for her safety before I came. She had complained of illness and giddiness all the afternoon, and with difficulty was dressed for the theatre. She fell into a stupor just as her carriage was ready."

"Ah, we are undone, we are undone," Herr Rödel groaned, in a fresh access of despair at these details. "No one, positively no one, is there to sing her part to-night. Ruined! ruined!"

"Pray calm yourself, Herr Rödel," Moritz interrupted,

in great alarm. "I am sure that I see a way out of this difficulty."

The angular doctor made his adieux and vanished.

"Rödel," exclaimed the young composer, "do you see that watch? In seven minutes I must be in my seat yonder with my band. In those seven minutes we *must* find a substitute to sing the rôle of the *Princess Zatime.*"

Rödel turned upon him like a caged animal. He laughed bitterly. "The company has not one under-study in it for this piece. We could not sacrifice any member of it, if there were. Oh, Topp! accursed Topp!"

"Fräulein Ehlert, your *protégée* and my friend, can take her place! You know something of her voice. I will wager my life on her knowing the part, and on her ability to take it, this moment."

"Nonsense! Do you think if I believed such a thing possible I would let you be the first to suggest it? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say! She knows the part quite well enough. We have been over the whole score together two or three times since Tuesday. Her memory is wonderful. I noticed that she scarcely looked at her notes yesterday. Rödel, I am certain that that girl can sing the part as well as Topp herself!"

"*Sakerment!* But it is impossible, impossible, I say." Rödel's eyes were nearly out of his head. "She never has sung a solo in her life, nor acted except—"

"She'll sing and act then all the better now, when so much depends upon her! I know, I *know* what I am talking about, Rödel. By heaven, you *shall* trust me! Haven't you always said that Fräulein Ehlert was a genius? Isn't this the very chance you have always hoped for her? Man, it looks like destiny!"

The manager's jaws came together with a snap. He stood for an instant bewildered, undecided, aghast Suddenly he looked up, as if a ray of faith and hope illumined his mind.

"Moritz Reisse!" he exclaimed, "you may be a madman, but your lunacy is catching! Fly, get this dear girl, this prodigy. I was a fool not to think of her myself! The house is not nearly settled yet!"

Elsa stood in her coquettish costume, with the sopranos and altos. It was plain that the Topp calamity was already an open secret. With every eye on him, Moritz darted up to Elsa. She answered nothing to his request, but followed the young man obediently.

"Fräulein Ehlert," whispered Rödel, addressing his *protégée* in stern ceremony, through his excitement, "you have heard of this wretched business that has befallen us? Herr Reisse here informs me that you are sufficiently familiar with the part of the *Princess Zatime* to assume it at once. Can it be possible that such is the truth?

"The part of the *Princess Zatime?*—I?—at once? repeated Elsa, glancing from one to the other of the faces before her, with her own face pale enough and her heart in a flutter. "Why, yes, Herr Rödel—perhaps I could. You know that this week Herr Reisse and I have been busy with the score—"

"I have not to doubt my pupil's excellent memory. Elsa, my child, we are in a sore strait. Do not try to do this thing unless you feel fairly certain of your ability. But if you can assume the part now, in five minutes, and carry it through fairly well, my dear, for God's love do it. If you can, I believe too that your reputation is made."

She stood white and silent before them.

"You alone can judge in such a matter; not we," the

manager added. He searched her countenance with his eyes. "Think—think well, I implore you!"

Not a word from her for a second or two. Her face lowered, thought balancing against thought within her mind, Elsa was obeying literally Rödel's word. Doubting, trembling, fascinated, the tried composer of the "Prinz Max" and the old manager hung upon her coming reply. All at once, looking up with an expression of full consciousness of what lay before her, the young singer answered calmly, "I have thought! I can do it. I am able. I will succeed."

As if by a preconcerted signal, the girl's bold resolution had just been uttered, when a long-resounding burst of applause without the curtain and the *Tusch* from the orchestra filled the theatre. It was the customary greeting to the Duke and his party, who took their seats in their box. To Rödel the occurrence was a superstitious climax.

"God bless you, my darling girl!" he exclaimed, seizing Elsa's hands. "Succeed you will! Be off with you! Angevine will see to your costume. I will send you the score. Be ready to enter with the second act. I will speak to the audience at once. Hurry down, Reisse!"

The sensation in the regions behind the curtain can be imagined. Fräulein Ehlert, of the chorus! What luck! what audacity! what partiality! In front, the buzz of tongues that followed manager Rödel's apologetic announcement from the footlights was more general but not at all hostile.

"Very untimely affair," remarked the Duke to one of his suite; "but then I have great confidence in Herr Rödel's judgment. I dare say this young artist was a special provision through it. We will expect the best of this Fräulein Elsa Ehlert, of Berlin, whatever she may be."

A very little later the crash of the prelude stilled all quodlibets. Moritz could be seen in his director's chair, conducting the orchestra with seeming composure. The bell rang, and up went the curtain amidst great applause for the scene-painter. The "Prinz Max" was begun, for either its good or its evil.

The first act went well. The finale, with its captivating dash and sparkle, elicited cheers. Everyone was called before the curtain half-a-dozen times. The Duke and another distinguished personage were observed by the feverish Rödel to clap their hands like schoolboys in their delight.

But the curtain had scarcely fallen before Moritz dashed across under the stage. He reached the little corridor communicating with Fräulein Topp's dressing-room. Rödel and a stranger were pacing up and down. The manager looked as if he would explode from sheer excitement. "She will be here in one moment," he murmured. "So far, all is good—good. Herr Reisse, let me make you and Herr X—— acquainted;" and he named a name eminent among the impresarios of the day.

The stranger bowed. "I understand that this sudden misfortune makes us anticipate an interesting event; dear me—yes, a most interesting event," began he, politely.

Moritz bowed, scarcely attending to such civilities. Would that dressing-room door ever open?

"You are truly lucky in having so gifted a young substitute for the afflicted lady! Dear me, yes; especially fortunate," went on the foreign manager, blandly. "I trust that all will pass off with delightful smoothness."

The door opened. Moritz and Rödel fell back in amaze ment. Elsa Ehlert stood on the threshold, followed by Bertha Grauschimmel and Frau Angevine, the gaslight

blazing behind her, some sheets of the score in her hand. Could this bright apparition be really Elsa? Her hitherto calm face was flashing with excitement into positive radiance that was not rouge. The improvised *Zatime* dress, all scarlet and gold, was rich and effective. The white and silver head-gear fell around her dark waves of hair. Her large eyes shone. She was a transformed creature in her piquant beauty. She advanced with a firm step that electrified the trio before her, and exclaimed with a gayety almost saucy, "Am I *comme il faut*, Herr Reisse? Manager Rödel, I am ready! Congratulate Frau Angevine and Bertha, if I suit you!"

"You—you—why, Elsa Ehlert, you are positively ravishing!" ejaculated Rödel, rapturously. "Indeed, who *are* you? Can this be my little *ganz-stillen?*"

She laughed inspiritingly. "And Herr Reisse has not yet pronounced his critical judgment on a toilette that, within half-an-hour, has certainly made itself and not been made."

Moritz started from his lethargy at this quotation. "I dare not criticise the costume of a stranger lady in her presence. This is not Fräulein Ehlert; this is the veritable *Princess Zatime* herself," he replied.

"I hope so," returned *Zatime.* "I've not dropped this music since they began work on me! Dear Herr Rödel, all will go well. I am sure of it now."

"And I too. Your courage, your beauty—ah, I have new life!" Truly the worthy old manager looked as if he had.

"Herr Reisse," pursued Elsa, "this cut here—this too, please! And look—I cannot think of that cabaletta—nor that thing there."

Moritz noted them in his score. He hurried off to his

orchestra. Rödel and Herr X—— sped elsewhere. Elsa re-entered her dressing-room. The shut door forbade further glimpses of her.

Once more in his chair before the footlights waiting for the signal for the beginning of the second act, he looked up at the box of his friend, Count Alexis von Gravenhorst. A gay little party were seated there. The Count had already rushed around into the wings to exchange a few words with his friend, and give a message of congratulation and sympathy from the Duke to Moritz.

"So that is von Gravenhorst's wife," soliloquized Moritz, "my fair hostess at Gravenhorst Lodge that will be?" His first violin, Herr Baun, had pointed out a stately brunette in a *voyante* lavender satin as the Countess von Gravenhorst. Moritz duly looked up at her admiringly. The other members of the Count's party were naturally in the rear and hidden from his sight. But for this fact, Moritz Reisse must undoubtedly have recognized, with an agitation greater than that caused by the news of Fräulein Topp's illness, the companion of the brunette lady in lavender—a companion who had persistently refused, under various pretexts, to occupy a seat between Count Alexis and her friend Fräulein Anna Lind.

Moritz, Moritz! Why are not your clear eyes able to pierce panel and drapery, and meet another pair surreptitiously bent upon you? Is it that your soul does not feel—

> . . . a secret weight,
> A warning of approaching fate?

But there was no time for predictions. The orchestra rushed into the beautiful *entre-acte*. The curtain rose on the palace-hall, and down it, surrounded by her train

came Elsa Ehlert. How her heart sank and rose within her breast, who can tell, despite the cordial acclaim welcoming her? Then her voice seemed, all at once, to be under its owner's perfect control, and that royal soprano—how often after that evening crowded audiences heard it in *Faust* and *La Juive* and *Tannhäuser!*—took flight in the little scena.

"Reizende Ahnung! Liebliche Hoffnung!"

Most truly had Elsa Ehlert prophesied that all must go well with her, and well with the "Prinz Max!" Never in B—— had such a *débutante* been heard. A simultaneous thrill of delight passed over the great audience. She had risen so unexpectedly from their midst, like a star out of the sea! Enchanted, enthusiastic, the theatre became a roaring whirlwind of applause as that extraordinary trill (for which she was later so renowned) concluded the aria. Rödel was like a man drunk with rapture. Moritz himself had expected no such exhibition of the young singer's talent. Behind the scenes echoed the bursts of acclaim which broke out again and again as the act advanced. The orchestra was drowned in the tumult of approval.

And in regard to her acting of the character, which Moritz had feared ill-suited to her, be it recollected that Reisse's "Prinz Max" was not the comic opera of to-day, but a vigorous bit of work with the spirit of scores by Boieldieu and Cornelius, Auber and Rossini, in its musical essence. Elsa, as she went on, unconsciously invested the role of *Zatime* with a naïve sentiment and a demure piquancy and tenderness underlying it, of which the librettist had probably little dreamed. It revealed even to the composer himself what he had not suspected. Vocally and dramatically she was an ideal, his ideal, *Zatime.*

The act ended. Elsa advanced to receive an ovation, led on by Rödel and Reisse. He pressed her hand as she stood next him, bowing beneath the applause. As she once ventured to turn her eyes upon Moritz's while they retraced their steps before the curtain, what joy in success for his sake and her own, what pleasure at his admiration, as distinct from the rest, and what a rapturous recognition of worthy art-service at last begun shone in her glance! Yet behind the shadow of Count Alexis von Gravenhorst's box another woman caught the look between the composer and singer, brief as it was.

Elsa rested, and received the congratulations that showered upon her during the short intermission vouchsafed. The foreign manager, the overjoyed Rödel, the Duke, the Great Personage, Count Alexis von Gravenhorst, and a guest—a dozen more of the privileged would not be denied the honor of expressing their enthusiasm. Never was such a thing heard of in B—— as this *début*. Among those who filled the little dressing-room, all talking at once, until the considerate Rödel fairly ordered them out, Moritz Reisse recognized a tall, well-behaved, and impassive-looking young man that Bertha Grauschimmel (now a sworn friend to Moritz) declared to be "that horrid, solemn Herr Steins; Elsa's betrothed, you know, Herr Reisse." Moritz and the man of the law presently found themselves shaking hands coldly. Johann accepted the evening's situation with a kind of proprietary indifference that absurdly exasperated Moritz.

The twenty minutes passed: the last act came on. With it, our friend Elsa outdid herself, and set the seal to the evening's glories. She was far more familiar with this act than the second. When she was uncertain, her improvisation was tact itself. The last note of the final

chorus dying away, came the assurances of the unparalleled success of "Prinz Max" and Fräulein Elsa Ehlert. The clappings and *bravissimi* threatened to split the roof of the Hoftheater. The finale must be sung again—that was certain. Sung over again it was. One more tumultuous good-night rang forth. The Duke and his guests stood up to applaud Elsa and Moritz and the whole cast, with Herr Rödel; and thereupon began the roll of carriages, and the enraptured folk streamed out under a starry sky to cool their hot heads. Manager Rödel insisted upon arranging the conventional late supper to which all the company were bidden. Very hilarious was that. But before leaving the theatre, Moritz darted back into the corridor. The door of Elsa's dressing-room was open, and she was within, left alone for a moment.

He entered; as she smiled once more and held out her hand he really knew not what to say, nor what he would like to say. His heart was swelling with more than merely the debt his gratified ambition owed. He met her eves, and, faltering out some broken sentence about "obligations—the crowning hour of my life," sank upon his knees and pressed his hot lips twice to her hand. Then he started up, just in time to avoid detection by Bertha and others, who appeared on the scene. He made his escape, scarcely conscious of his passionate act.

CHAPTER V.

"He must needs go that the Devil drives."
All's Well That Ends Well.

"By Jove, Reisse! There hasn't been such a success of a singer and an opera in a dozen years!" exclaimed Count Alexis von Gravenhorst in course of a hurried call in the Hoftheater a week later. "I haven't a minute to spare; but I thought I must run in and say so. Four times since the first night, by Ducal order! And such houses! and nobody talking of anything except Fräulein Ehlert and your music!"

"It is a great thing for *her*," returned Moritz, smiling, —"unknown yesterday, famous to-day. By-the-by, Herr Rödel, what do you think about her accepting a Berlin engagement?"

"Oh, she has proposals from several sides, my dear Herr!" said Rödel, looking up from his account-books; "but the Duke will have a word first on that point. We shall see! He will not allow her so soon to leave B——."

"How does she bear her good-fortune, Rödel?" asked von Gravenhorst.

"Like the sensible girl she is," replied he, jealous of his pet's character. "No turning of *her* head! She has moved herself and her old father into rather better quarters and keeps a maid—that is all the change I know of. As for these noble folk, of *your* class, Herr Count, go about persecuting her with attentions and wanting to know her, she minds them not a whistle. She leaves

their manœuvrings to me. She is as simple and unspoiled as ever. Oh, I tell you, Elsa Ehlert is a marvellous girl—none other would conduct herself so admirably!"

"Fräulein Topp is still too ill to sing?"

"Yes, or pretends she is. I'm sorry for her; but the fact is, she was growing too old, and the Duke will give her a generous pension. Fräulein Ehlert will occupy her post until the season's end, by the express desire of the Duke. She sang at the Residenz yesterday, you know, and she was made a great deal of. She appears to-night as *Valentine*, by-the-by—and a magnificent success she is certain to make of it. Meyerbeer talked of coming over."

The three men chatted for a few moments more; then the Count, turning to Reisse, began: "I am wasting my time. Let us plan at once for your coming up to the Lodge to spend this promised summer with my wife and myself. We are delighted at the prospect, I assure you. By-the-by, in your note I discovered a droll mistake. You have still, according to it, to see the Countess for the first time. That was not she in the front of the box on the evening of the first performance! The lady in lavender was Fräulein Lind, her great friend. My wife complained of a headache and sat well out of the glare of the stage all the evening. But to resume—we shall expect you the instant you are free from musical duty. I can't come down from Gravenhorst often just at present, but a note will tell me when to send the carriage. It's a long drive—pleasanter than the railroad journey, however."

Sundry further arrangements being assured, the Count hurried off.

The excitement of the past month seemed like a dream to Moritz, as a few weeks after this chat he found himself lying back luxuriously in the comfortable travelling car-

riage sent for him to B—— by Alexis, and idly watched the rolling wheels that bore him from the city, its Hof-theater, Elsa Ehlert, and all other cares or novel distractions.

The season had closed triumphantly with two farewell performances of his "Prinz Max." He had bidden Elsa and Rödel good-bye rather reluctantly. The young singer was to accompany the manager and a certain Baron and Baroness Brandt to a spa to recruit herself. She and Moritz had naturally seen a good deal of each other since the production of his opera; and, Johann Steins or not, Elsa's mind was gradually growing accustomed to pondering upon a type of the man in art to an extent which she did not yet discern. As for Moritz, his was a nature to reverence Elsa with a vague devotion; but to feel love, passion, for her antitype. He already admitted to himself that he half worshipped her. He never considered her in the light of a woman for his love. He felt that psychologically he was not the man to love such a girl. She surely must leave him some day; and with that inevitable divergence of their paths he must be plunged once more into the hot and commonplace turmoil from the fume of which her influence so mysteriously seemed to lift him. To her he might be a flesh-and-blood reality; to him, she was still more or less an abstract influence—beneficent, condescending—apart.

The carriage sped onward while Moritz ruminated indolently. On either side of the highway the walls and hedges were green with overrunning vines and briars. The thick-ankled peasant women diligent in the fields, the sunny meadows, yellow with new grain, the delicately verdant reaches of vineyards aslant the hills, and the distant blue of the mountain chain growing darker as he approached—all these delighted his eye

and enhanced his grateful sense of liberty and a welcome at the end of the road. By eleven o'clock the spires of B—— rose afar back in the green plain. The carriage-track became more or less shut within gorges and spurs of the low foothills of the mountain chain.

It was the first time that he had accepted an invitation to von Gravenhorst's villa.

Indeed he and Alexis had scarcely seen one another since their student days in Munich together. In that time and city Alexis had fancied Reisse and his gay Bohemian circle of musicians, painters, and literarians, and had become somewhat of an art enthusiast for the time being. But Alexis left Munich to succeed to his father's property. Practical duty anon dissipated the young nobleman's art-hobbies and turned him into a gentleman-farmer, with all the sudden intentness that was part of his nature. He and Reisse soon ceased even to correspond, nor did the Count concern himself with any of the merry fraternity. But when Moritz came to B—— the friendship quickened to new life at once.

It would have been difficult for Moritz to light upon a more retired summer retreat than was promised by the glimpses of the Lodge Park into which a private road suddenly admitted the carriage. A veritable atmosphere of weariness and languid hours seemed to shut in the stranger who passed the geranium-crowned gates of this hermitage on which Alexis' father had spent years of care. Vistas of narrow alleys, miniature lakes, where swans floated leisurely, sombre depths of almost forest, where ferns and rhododendrons looked skyward—every rood breathed a certain quiescence, loneliness, mystery. And then, all at once, around a turn of the ever-ascending avenue, appeared a stalwart figure and a full-bearded, manly face—Alexis

von Gravenhorst, swinging a thick walking-cane and shouting a greeting seconded by the fine hound beside him.

"You are half-an-hour later, my dear fellow, than I expected you," said the Count, leaping into the carriage, and grasping Reisse's hand. "Welcome a thousand times to Gravenhorst! The Countess and I propose to make you forget that operas and symphonies are your mission upon earth."

"I fear I too readily yield to such kind artifices," replied Moritz. "Surely this is the Paradise of Indolence. The new opera I have promised to write for Berlin will become a dream unless I take care. You and the Countess are quite by yourselves, I believe you wrote me."

"Entirely, and therefore doubly pleased at your society. I am sorry, by-the-by, that there has been a delay in a new piano I have ordered for our music-room as a fourth member of our circle; but it will be sent shortly, they tell me. Let me tell you, Reisse, that I believe that I find in you and my wife two individuals absolutely certain to be pleased with one another. She and I have often looked forward to this meeting here."

"Your marriage was a sudden and quiet one," Moritz said.

"Yes. Nadine is a Pole by birth and education. I met her in Warsaw and there married her; and since our arrival in Germany we have lived extremely retired. Her health is more or less delicate, and the air here agrees with her peculiarly. My wife's early history is a painful one. I rarely allude to it—in fact, I have tried my best to teach her to forget it. Her adopted mother, Princess Berinski, was a most superior woman."

Started upon the topic of his wife, Count Alexis was disposed to continue a good deal further, for after a short

silence, he went on: "I am curious to know if you will find my wife and myself so unlike as I delight in telling her we are. Art, I long ago put away forever. I have learned to think about ditches and crops and my tenantry and my stables, instead of the piano and the studios. She, I verily believe, lives in a world of art daily. Why, Nadine is a most accomplished musician, and as a painter, some great brushes have told me that she could easily win decided distinction. In fact, Reisse," the Count continued, meditative and smiling, "I often wonder how it was that a woman like Nadine ever was willing to marry a fellow like me. But married we were; and, good heavens! how happy we are! I am proud of her. She, I confess, seems satisfied with me. All the same, I am overjoyed at her having in you a kindred spirit, with whom she can interchange high and æsthetic ideas for weeks to come. I dread your table-talk already."

They rumbled out abruptly between some clumps of firs, through which the Lodge showed itself in all its stateliness; and after that the carriage ran smoothly out of the avenue and into the plateau before the castle. The granite façade and broad steps looked across a flat garden severely laid out in the English style, and embellished with fountains and statuary. Beyond this came the wooded brink of the mountain itself. Thence, a bewilderingly broad prospect stretched out below.

"Never mind your toilet. I am in haste myself. You are a man of genius and therefore excusable. Let me take you to Nadine at once. I presume she is still in her usual morning haunt, her *plein air* studio, I call it."

Moritz had opportunity for but a few words of remonstrance before he found himself piloted by his friend across the hallway, a breezy passage running quite through the

ground-floor of the Lodge. It opened into the gardens. The walls were hung, after the fashion of so many similar apartments, with large hunting-scenes, horns, and skins (Alexis affected to despise the chase, and these were relics of other people's prowess in remote expeditions), and a collection of arms. They passed out into the rear garden. Moritz immediately observed that this was very differently laid out from those in front, and was, apparently, nothing but a small wilderness of dark-red roses and lilies. "My wife has an absolute passion for dark-red roses," explained Alexis.

The Count's words, the sight, the perfume of the voluptuous flowers awoke for an instant old memories within Moritz's heart. He had once known a woman with a passion for dark-red roses. Little thought he, however, that with every advancing step into that blooming labyrinth he was involving himself more inextricably within the maze of his own evil destiny.

The rise of the ground, and an abrupt turn of the narrow path suddenly revealed another outlook, although a high hedge hid even the chimneys of the Lodge beneath. With admirable taste, a large Turkish summer-house had been built on this spot, the crown of the mountain. It stood just in advance of them. A lady was its sole occupant. Her back was directly toward them. An easel was before her. Absorbed in her occupation, she apparently did not realize that any intruders were approaching, until their footsteps grated on the stone before the threshold. The Countess von Gravenhorst turned as if in surprise. Her brush still in her hand, she stood in the centre of the building to receive her husband and the expected guest.

"My dear Nadine! behold my old friend, Herr Reisse," said Alexis, doing the honors in smiling good-humor.

"whose acquaintance I am delighted to have you make —*et vice versa.*"

Moritz bowed. He scarcely knew what he said. He murmured some words of commonplace salutation, amazed at this unexpected encounter. But the Countess von Gravenhorst, whatsoever emotions were fluctuating beneath her unruffled exterior, betrayed little of them. Her beautiful face, ever of a singular pallor, grew slightly paler, and her little hand grasped the back of the low willow chair from which she had risen, with a clench that made the small knuckles white against it. Her tall, slender figure, in its clinging white dress, bent in calm greeting, and she replied calmly:

"I am charmed to meet Herr Reisse of whom I have long known so much." (There was a slightly marked inflection of the last words.) "Ennui may punish you speedily, Herr Reisse, for consenting to bury yourself in this out-of-the-world spot for a while. I assure you that my husband and I have looked forward to your visit with the greatest pleasure."

"The pleasure of a sojourn here under such delightful circumstances, Countess, is a matter of congratulation to myself," responded Moritz. His voice in this swift speech sounded to him oddly mechanical and far-away as he spoke. "I can hardly express the pleasant anticipations I have formed in coming up through the park with your husband."

"Let us hope it will prove the scene of a pleasant intimacy," said the Countess, with calm courtesy. "My husband has, I believe, already pledged our mutual amity Herr Reisse. Is it not so, Alexis?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the Count, "and I must leave you this instant to develop it. I am sorry, Reisse, but Bis-

choff (my land-steward and, at present, an inexorable tyrant) threatened me with all sorts of vengeance if I did not get back to him within the half-hour. I don't intend to begin using ceremony with you, my dear fellow; I shall leave you at once, and in much better company. Farewell until luncheon. Adieu, Nadine; play the courteous *chatelaine*. Talk music. I go to talk—drains."

He turned to quit the summer-house. His wife hastily followed him. "You will not leave us so soon to-day, Alexis?" she exclaimed, somewhat appealingly. "Do you know, I have scarcely seen you these last two days? My husband," she added, apologetically, to Moritz, "is, during the present summer, more a stranger to his wife, I fear, than to our few guests. Can you not just spare us a single hour this morning, Alexis?"

"Not a single hour of this morning above all others; nor, indeed, any until this accursed new ditching system proves a success or a failure. I am a farmer, Reisse. From now until August I shall be a hard-worked one, too. No—I must be off this minute."

"Even though I bar your passage?" said the Countess, in a tone divided between banter and entreaty.

She took her hand from his shoulder. Facing him, smiling, she stretched out her arms from pillar to pillar of the narrow entrance to the kiosk. Alexis, in a sudden impulsiveness rare with him, leaned to her upturned face. He lightly kissed her. Was it fancy, or did she flush and shrink a little from his caress? Her husband vaulted lightly over the low rail. He stood laughing outside upon the turf. "To your mutual satisfaction in one another's society, my friends, between now and luncheon. Begin to rave about *allegro* and *adagio con sentimento* and *maestoso* as soon as you like," he said. Then he disappeared down a path to the Lodge, whistling a street tune vigorously.

CHAPTER VI.

'My lord, I must confess I know this woman;
And five years since, there was some speech of marriage
Betwixt myself and her, which was broke off.
Measure for Measure.

ALEXIS VON GRAVENHORST left behind a tableau which, if he had turned his head and understood it, might have made that light-hearted young man cease whistling and step less buoyantly onward toward his land-steward's cottage.

Moritz stood where he had paused on entering the little kiosk. Moritz also was now pale, and he bit his lip in embarrassment. The Countess von Gravenhorst, after following her stalwart husband with her eyes, turned from the door and walked to the opposite side of the little building. There she, too, stood as one alone by herself, almost with her back to Moritz, looking out over the landscape below. Neither spoke, nor seemed to notice the absence of speech. From the first second in which Moritz had entered the place and had recognized his friend's wife, he had felt as if all that world below them had dropped down into space beneath, and left himself and this woman solitary and alone. He had felt as if the world had indeed, for him, come to an end. Or, might it not rather be just again beginning?

Slowly the Countess turned toward him, steadying herself against the parapet. Effort at suppressing the real selves of these two persons, united here by a hardly remote past, was ended.

"So, it is you?" said she, bitterly.

"I—myself. And this is also—you?" replied Moritz, looking up at her. His voice again sounded so unlike an utterance from his own lips that he could scarcely realize that the words were his own. "After these years, it seems, we meet to-day?—here and under such circumstances? Why have you not forewarned me, prevented it?" he continued, passionately. "Do you suppose that had I for an instant suspected in the wife of my friend Alexis von Gravenhorst the woman whom I knew as Nadine von Lillienberg, I should have set my foot in this unhappy spot? On your head, on your head alone, be the blame for this miserable rencontre."

"On my head alone, Moritz," replied the Countess, with a mingled accent of bitterness and pathos; "and upon yours the discourtesy of such a greeting. Have I, then," she continued, sadly, "become in truth such a thing of aversion in your eyes that your first words now to me are of scorn and reproach?"

"Is there, then, anything due from me to you except scorn and reproach?" he returned. "Yet stay—I forget that I stand in the presence of a Countess von Gravenhorst. One question before any other. Does your husband, does Alexis, dream—?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed the Countess; "through you alone can suspicion now enter his careless heart!. What has been between us is still our secret. No, thank God!" she added, clasping her fingers together with a sudden nervous gesture.

"And I am his guest, his friend," cried Moritz, "bidden here to pass weeks at his side, at yours—beneath the same roof and in hourly intercourse! And you have suffered it to come about without a word!"

She looked gravely at him as he spoke thus hotly. "You mistake," said she; "I did indeed learn of your coming, but not until too late, without arousing suspicion, to oppose it." Suspicion! He, the most utterly unsuspecting of all mankind; blind in his confidence in his wife, in his obedience to her lightest request!— "I — I have been a coward. Oppose? There are a thousand reasons, besides those known to you, why for worlds I now would not dare do it."

"And he has never mentioned my name to you until lately? He has never till lately spoken of our acquaintance in Munich? Good heavens, were you not in the theatre that night of the 'Prinz Max'?"

"Alexis rarely alludes to any of the associations of his bohemian days," the Countess replied, with the faintest tinge of a sneer in her voice. "As for the theatre, I was indeed there. I saw you—I rejoiced in your triumph. But Alexis had not uttered a word to me of his really and definitely inviting you hither. I avoided your sight—the next day I quitted the town. You see," she continued, with a smile of cold irony, "I have not decoyed you to my presence, as your words would seem to imply. It is a simple *coup de la destinée*, Moritz. Do you indeed actually suppose," moving, with this, a step toward him, and with warming voice, "that I so hunger and thirst, after years of absence, for the society of a man who parted from me, whom I see meeting me again in this hour with hatred and contempt, that I, *I* scheme and plot and plan to bring him once more before my face when at my side stands—a husband? Upon my word you are very complimentary to yourself, Moritz!—far less so to me."

Moritz winced under this frankly-expressed divination of his real suspicion that not without some design on the part

of Countess Nadine herself had this situation come about. He replied coldly, "You are right! Your regard for me, of old, would indeed scarcely forebode such an effort to-day. Before, however, we enter upon the question of what either of us shall do under these unforeseen circumstances, will you be good enough to explain to me how it is that Nadine von Lillienberg and the Countess von Gravenhorst have become one and the same person? I confess to a vulgar curiosity to learn the steps by which you have achieved so brilliant a position—one, I may add, so thoroughly suited to my recollections of your ambitions and tastes. Nadine von Gravenhorst—Nadine Berinski;—Nadine—strange I did not feel some presentiment! Yet the name is common."

Her face flushed. "If you desire an autobiography at once, the sooner the background of affairs is sketched the better. I can give it very briefly, too; it may avoid catechism—which I do not especially affect. Be good enough to sit there." She pointed to a rustic seat near the round table and drew her easel-stool towards her. "I am tired and, I dare say, excited. I need all my little strength."

The table between them, strewn with brushes and colors, suggested a barricade. Moritz seated himself.

"Lieschen—you recall her, don't you?—poor, faithful creature! she died in Vienna within that year—Lieschen gave you the letter that I wrote you that last night in Milan, in which I told you the truth: that I was—not worthy of you; that I dared not blend your future and mine. Moritz,—if any man dreams what it costs a woman to—" She paused; then resumed:

"My father and I remained in Turin a few days only. That he had some knowledge of our plan I am fairly convinced, although he made no direct allusion to it while we remained in Turin. All at once he said, 'We must leave

here. Be prepared. We shall not return.' Within three hours truly, we were out of the city. We went direct to Paris. My father scarcely uttered a syllable to me during the journey. We spent a week in Paris. At the end of it he brusquely informed me that he had decided upon returning to Vienna without loss of time. I gathered, of course, that his play had been as unfortunate as during those last weeks in Turin ; that he felt himself forced to go. We arrived in Vienna upon the third day—home again. As I sat in my desolate room in the evening, attempting to realize all that had so lately occurred, my heart battling fiercely with my judgment, Moritz, my father came in abruptly. He dismissed my maid. Leaning against the chimney-piece he said, 'You are once more in your own city. I have no wish, I assure you, by word, look, or sign, to allude to past follies. Chill your heart to like forgetfulness. I believe you have wisely begun to do that already. No rumor of what has occurred need follow us. I have guarded against that. Be obedient henceforth. You are forgiven. I have still influence enough here, I believe, to marry you advantageously. You have your beauty—your wit—yourself. Marry you as speedily as I can, I certainly shall, I warn you. What I had in train in Milan as to the matter might have been successful had not your composer-lover and my untoward luck together—but no matter. There are eligible strangers, too, in town, of my acquaintance, even now. A project has already presented itself to me. All I say to you is—obey—forget. Treat your heart like a slate under a wet sponge. Do you understand ? You know the alternatives.' I bowed my head in silence. Had I not sacrified my everything in life already ?—believe it, Moritz, or not, as you will." The speaker added this, observing the incredulous curl of his lip. " So far as I could. I obeyed.

I returned that season to society. My father's affairs seemed to be temporarily on a better footing. As he had prophesied, no breath from afar, of those days in Milan, ever reached my old circle in Vienna, that I could become aware of. In less than two months he presented to me Leo von Berinski, a young Polish noble of wealth, spending the year in Vienna; presented him as a suitor. I accepted him without hesitation, in obedience to my promise, my orders. All men were now alike to me. The romance of my life was ended forever. Berinski was amiable, polite, of position at Warsaw. His mother became passionately attracted to me. The preparations for my wedding advanced. My very toilettes were completed. Then Berinski was killed—shot dead, murderously, in a duel with a Viennese over a gaming-table accusation. My father was terribly involved in the affair. It should, I afterwards learned, have been his quarrel. The Princess Berinski never suspected that. But a disgraceful scandal burst out. My father was ruined. Hitherto his practices had escaped exposure. Within three days after his expected son-in-law's death my father, too, died. He died by his own hand, in his own house—"

"What!" exclaimed Moritz, in horror, raising his eyes from the floor, where they had been fixed during this recital. "Your father dead?"

"Dead," returned the Countess von Gravenhorst, in the unmoved tone of one who narrates a history as to which all emotion in the teller's heart is spent—"a suicide, four years ago in October. I need not tell you in what confusion his affairs were left. Nothing would remain for me. In my perplexity I found I had one true, if new, friend—the widowed and now childless old Princess Berinski. 'Come,' said she to me; 'quit this wretched city of your father's

dishonored name and of your ruined fortunes. The sins of the parent shall not be visited on your head, so far as I am concerned. I had begun to love you already as my daughter-in-law. Be my daughter, my child, in place of the one I have just lost, and in place of his sister Nadine, who died before him.'

"With Princess Berinski I accordingly turned my back on Vienna. I have never set foot there since. I lived very quietly with my kind adopted parent in Warsaw. I even assumed her name at length and at her request, striving to bury more completely Nadine von Lillienberg in Nadine Berinski. One year later Alexis von Gravenhorst met me and loved me. The Princess herself (she died a month after our marriage) eagerly desired the match. She expatiated on the advantages of it. I had no good reason to refuse it. Passion, love, the happiness of married life were, I knew, destined to be forever empty words to me. Why not Count von Gravenhorst as well as some other? Stay, I divine your question! One thing I did first. I insisted that before I stood at the altar with him my personal history should be laid plainly before him. Some fragments of it he must of course have gathered here and there from other sources. I had an interview with my future husband. I told Alexis all, all—except the history of the months in Milan, my meeting with you there, your name. The sacred mystery of—of *those* days I had locked up in my heart forever. My bitter story ended, Alexis clasped me in his arms. 'To make you forget the past shall be the work of my future!' he cried. He has kept his vow. Everything that mortal man could do to render wife happy has he done. Never an allusion to my past escapes his lips, his look. I married him. The rest you can supply."

CHAPTER VII.

"She doth well ; if she should make tender of her love, tis very possible he'll scorn it."

Much Ado About Nothing.

DURING the whole of this narrative given him, first and last, in the same colorless tone, Moritz Reisse sat almost motionless, his head resting on his palm, his elbows on the table, his eyes still fixed on the floor. When the Countess concluded, for an instant there was no sound. He looked up.

"You married him," he repeated, "and the rest I can supply ? That means, doubtless, that you are very happy —and that you love him—of course."

"That should indeed mean that I am very happy, Moritz, and that I love him, of course," the Countess replied, with a bitter smile and a curious inflection of voice.

"Thank you," he said, coldly. "Your history is a positive romance."

"Romance !" she exclaimed ; "a romance ! All your sympathy then is expressed in that word ? Ah, Moritz"— and rising from her seat she extended her slender hand with a gesture almost of appeal—"had I four years ago in Milan kept faith that night, consented to fly with you and become your wife—had I allowed myself to cloud with my own uncertain lot your career, dare you say now whether through you the story I have just told would be any fairer ? Would not you yourself surely, as I then told you, have been dragged down into obscurity, with ill-fortune,

nay, perhaps disgrace? Would not you yourself have played some miserable, helpless part in it, to your own ruin? Instead," she added, bitterly, "you stand here perfectly free, untrammelled by it, to hear from my own lips the result of my sacrifice! You tell me by your every look and accent that you recognize in it the chastisement due me for then sending you and love from me forever."

"*I* look kindly upon your griefs and misfortunes?" exclaimed Moritz; "*I* discern in them a punishment? Heaven forbid! Nevertheless," he added, relapsing into his former cold manner, "let me, since you yourself speak of some unfortunate hours of our acquaintance, declare (and I trust for the last time) my opinion as to the motives for what you are pleased still to call your sacrifice. Would you still have me believe that you banished me from you that night in Milan because you were unwilling to cloud my life with your own?—because of your unhappy father and your duty to him? Ah, why not here and now, in perhaps our last interview, confess the truth? Your pride was greater than your love, then and always. You had long known of your father's ambitious intentions for you. You had long seconded them. You fully understood what might be brought to pass. I met you. For a brief while you forgot in me your perpetual longings for a divorce from that wretchedly hazardous career and position inseparable from your companionship with your father. You forgot your vow, so accordant with his hopes, of a marriage which should enthrone you safely above all tides of fate in a social empire. Your heart spoke loudly for me. But I was merely a musician, the fashion of the hour. I had neither rank nor established fortune; I had hardly a name. At the last moment your ambition overcame your passion. You could not face the uncertain future. Your love bowed

before the test. Not it, but your pride impelled you to drive me from you."

"What!" exclaimed the Countess, a sudden passion trembling in her voice, "dare you in memory of those days and nights that were ours, affirm that I did not love you?"

"You loved me, yes," he answered coldly, "—but not enough. But not enough."

There was again a short silence. The accusation, true or false, echoed in both hearts. "Well, come," Moritz resumed, abruptly; "why speak of what has been long dead? This present situation is enough to occupy us. There is but one thing for me to do. I must leave Gravenhorst at once."

"Leave Gravenhorst! You cannot, you must not!" exclaimed the Countess, betraying her alarm. If she had resolved to compass any certain scheme in having her old love again at her side, she had now to play her cards with skill, or they would avail her nothing. "Have you not come here for the summer?—with the understanding that you were to remain weeks? A sudden departure, the absence of suitable excuse—this alone would arouse a thousand surmises in his mind."

"A suitable excuse must be found," returned Moritz, composedly. "Do not be alarmed. I possess ordinary discretion. I shall not return to B—— this afternoon. Yet, granting that I should think of so doing, is it not far better that Alexis should imagine something, should question you, learn a little, nay, all of the truth now, than later, when I shall have been here for even a single week?"

The Countess turned her face from him and said. "I am unable to follow you there."

Moritz continued.

"Tell him to-day the story of those days in Milan, wherein

I, his friend, was an actor. Is there anything that can mar his faith in you? I was once your lover. You cared for me. Our love was opposed by your father. He dismissed my suit. You, in time, conquered and forgot your passion. What else says the record of those days, all told? And there are reasons why any woman may keep back such a secret of her past from the man she marries. But, on the other hand, let me, let any man whom you might admit that you once loved, remain here under your roof a fortnight. Let two persons be thrown together so inexorably as (cannot you see it from your husband's own words?) you and I are likely to be! In after months or years, some wandering chance brings this long-hidden chapter to his ears—I wonder that in spite of your retired life it has so long been unsuspected. Who, who, can tell what doubts, or worse, may attack his heart? How can his recollection of the life his wife and his friend led here together, and of the strange comedy we two must have acted, escape the taint of poison? I know Alexis perhaps better than you do. Whatever he seems now, in such an hour I tremble for him and for you!"

"Your prophecy is disinterested, but it is absurd," the Countess answered, with that mockery of accent which seemed now to have transferred itself from her former lover to herself. "Neither do you, I see, know my husband. Alexis is not a man to insult his wife with idle suspicions, born of trifles, at any time—present or future. I am sorry that your acquaintance with his character as it was, your penetration of it as it is, enables you to read it no more intelligently. Furthermore, you speak of a possible comedy to be played should you accept the hospitalities of Gravenhorst Lodge for a fortnight or so; of rôles to be sustained by you, by myself. Comedies?—

rôles? Moritz, I know of none! I shall certainly assume none! It need give neither of us the slightest embarrassment to be thrown together, as you call it—in his presence or out of it. My friend, you and I who speak thus are well-nigh strangers. Remember that. You are simply an entertaining guest—I, your hostess. There is abundance of employment, topics enough in common between us to spare us the doleful amusement of awakening in our hearts one echo of the past. That past is dead to you, to me. The Moritz Reisse I once knew and loved—for love him I did," she added, firmly, "is dead. I now verily believe it. The Nadine von Lilienberg of your memory? Dead likewise. Or let us say that neither has ever existed. They have been dreams of youth and warm fancy. What more could we wish?"

"But will they be dead always? Will they not stir, awake, rise up to life in some unexpected instant?" Moritz had spoken before he thought.

"A resurrection like that?" the Countess queried, slightly smiling and raising her perfect-arched eyebrows. "And which one, pray, is likely first to be guilty of so indiscreet a liberty? Better still—in place of utter indifference within us, let it be that you are yourself, I am myself. That you despise me, and that I have ceased to admire you. Ah, Moritz," the Countess added, smiling a little less ironically, and speaking somewhat more in her natural voice, "might not we two in truth be said to stand in this moment on the best terms on which to begin a—friendship, as friendship in this world often goes—we have not an atom of favorable prejudice toward one another?"

"Quite true—but even hatred implies mutual respect," responded Moritz.

"And I have lost yours?" she answered.

She turned her head from him and looked again at the plains and the horizon. He saw a faint rose-tint come into her white face at the taunt. Her eyes seemed full of tears. In an instant his whole heart stirred within him. The tenderness of a man's nature for the past, suddenly brought up in battle-array against his judgment and pride, the sight of the woman around whom that past had centred standing there in humiliation at his words; the mute reproach and pathos of her apparently involuntary emotion—these together seduced him from his position more irresistibly than any argument would have done. He looked at her. He then drew a step nearer to her in sudden confusion and remorse, or in the first pulsations of another nameless feeling. Nadine von Gravenhorst did not turn her head, although she probably realized every motion that he made, and was conscious of each expression passing over his face. She felt a quick assurance that all went as she desired, and that tears, however called into her eyes, had won for her a first victory—the victory, old as the earth, of woman's magnetism over man's convictions.

"Nadine," Moritz exclaimed, softly, "I am wrong! I have been cruel. Forgive these words I have so hastily spoken. We have indeed too much with which to reproach our destinies to feel bitterness against one another. Have not you, have not I, done penance for any mutual errors?"

The Countess turned toward him; her eyes met his own with a grave, unfathomable gaze. He continued, "However soon I must leave you—and when I do it will probably be never to meet again—let us part in peace. Nay, more; let me say adieu as, in some sense, your friend.

In the recollection of what once was, I could not be otherwise."

A glow lighted up the Countess's face with each word. A transforming expression stole over it. "Your friend?" she repeated, in an accent of doubt. "The word I spoke in mockery, he repeats seriously! Friendship between us, Moritz? Do not describe in jest what is impossible!"

His long resentment, the scorn of years—whither had both fled? A few words, a look from her, had proved how false had these emotions been and how enduring any tenderness beneath. When we truly love we never can unlove? Certainly Moritz Reisse had once loved her with all the intensity of his passionate nature. Had something more than the romantic sentiment for the love-dream of his life persistently tenanted his heart even until this hour?

"It is not impossible for me," he replied, almost passionately. "It must not now be impossible for you. Let us bury our dead selves. You have wisely called them such. With them are dead their errors, their follies, their faults. In spite of such, are not the dead remembered with kindness, and forgiven? Let it be so."

He held out his hand as he spoke. The Countess glanced down at the extended hand. Who can tell what triumph, the realization of dreams, the fulfillment of vows sworn within herself, she saw in this first step gained?

With the smile and the frank gesture of a child she took his hand. "Yes, friends—new friends, Moritz," she exclaimed, "and all our bitterness and anger and other tragedy-playing ended forever! Willingly, willingly!"

A pressure, and the clasped hands parted. Relief and lightness came to Moritz's heart.

"And you will not fly from Gravenhorst as if I were a

basilisk?" she inquired, with graceful gayety. Moritz hesitated. The inconsistency of suddenly altering his announced decision struck him far more than the first faint birth of positive reluctance to go. He temporized with himself.

"I had best return to B—— as soon as practicable. But for some days I will gladly be a guest at Gravenhorst. Besides," he added, "an opera libretto is to be forwarded to me here; I shall be obliged to busy myself more or less with that."

"Idle or occupied you will be the welcomest of friends," replied the Countess. Glancing at her watch, she added, "And now for Alexis and luncheon."

She gathered up a few of her belongings on the table. The two quitted the kiosk together. They walked down the sinuous pathway. Nadine began eagerly to question him concerning the events of latter years and his musical successes. He found himself talking with her much in the old fashion. The memories of their common past constantly awoke. Nadine began diplomatically to assure herself that no other woman had come to be to Moritz Reisse what she had been. She was even able to satisfy herself that there was no warmer feeling between himself and the young singer, Fräulein Elsa Ehlert, than a certain sympathetic acquaintance although of a character which she could not fully define. On this point, however, Reisse was then and afterwards shyly difficult of approach.

The longer Moritz chatted thus without embarrassment with Nadine, the more the scene of a little while earlier seemed to him ridiculous and unnecessary. There was no reason why this pleasant, frank treaty of peace might not have been made, almost tacitly, at once. He had been a fool, he said to himself; possibly an unjust fool.

As many another man of his temperament might have done, Moritz did not now stop to ask himself whether reconciliation had altered the original causes of discord in any degree. He did not stop to remember that overlooking them was not removing them, nor reflect that a comedy, unavoidable and of most problematic results, still remained to be sustained as to friend and host. He did not discern how anomalous was this situation which he accepted so easily and with such increasing satisfaction—that it must certainly bring forth difficulties. He was soothed, lapped by the charm which Nadine was already beginning to exert with every word, look, and gesture. Underneath, dangerous still was the presence of his own undreamed-of passion. It is no uncommon state to fall into, nor likely to be, so long as women inhabit the earth, and to some are given the spell for the binding and unloosing of the judgments of men.

As he walked at her side slowly across the garden, Moritz could not but compare Nadine with her former self. Unmistakably, her beauty had developed, her graces of speech and manner doubled. Our saunterers reached the porch. Moritz parted from the Countess at the staircase, and went up to his chamber with a valet. There he remained until Alexis's hospitable self summoned him downstairs to luncheon.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Arm thy constant and thy nobler parts
Against these giddy, loose suggestions."
King John.

A WEEK slipped away almost before he was aware of it. He was still a guest at the Lodge. Each night of the seven he went to his bed saying to himself that the next day must be, under one excuse or another, his last beneath Von Gravenhorst's roof. Each morning he awaked feeling a lazier reluctance to put his resolution into effect, and losing sight more and more of the need of its performance. This feeling increased just in proportion as the awkward corners of the situation seemed to smooth themselves down. He met the Countess without embarrassment. Her tact and insight came constantly into action. Contrary to his expectations, he saw his hostess chiefly in her husband's presence. Alexis was temporarily freer from his agricultural cares.

It was true that Moritz and Nadine talked of art, of a thousand topics in which each knew the other was interested. Yet, if some well-remembered opinion, some favorite sentiment recalled from the past (and it may be readily imagined that there were many) flashed into Moritz's mind, the wife of Alexis seemed absolutely dull to them. Was it that she now veritably was capable of only a pleasant artistic friendship with a former lover? Had she become truly quite indifferent to the sentimental relations of a few years before? Or was her conduct in pursuance of an ulterior end,

to accomplish which a present conservatism was everything?

If the latter, not the unguarded lifting of an eyelash betrayed her. She was serene and hospitable. She exerted all her gifts, as should any well-educated woman of the world, of fine artistic perceptions and training, in the presence of her husband's old friend. Alexis was charmed to see his wife appear to such advantage.

It happened that this particular fortnight at the Lodge brought an unwonted number of daylight or evening callers and visitors. Three or four neighbors of Count Alexis, the Waldemars, the Linds, Baron This or General So-and-so, with their wives and daughters, tardy in paying formal respects for the season, drove over, by twos and threes, of an afternoon. They sauntered in parties with their hospitable entertainers about the grounds, and, other callers perhaps driving up, remained for an impromptu supper-party and a lively evening. The piano for the music-room had not yet arrived from Berlin, a small but excellent harmonium occupying the apartment. Meantime, no music was attempted. Overflowing shelves in the music-room satisfied Moritz that a voice, once matchless for its charm, was still cultivated; but neither the solicitations of her husband or her friends induced the Countess to sing with such accompaniment as was practicable.

On one evening in particular the party, five or six in number, were seated upon the great front piazza of the Lodge. The young son of a friend, present with his father, brought a violin from the music-room and played tastefully during the pauses of the conversation. Chancing to hit upon the melody of a favorite song, again came entreaties for the Countess to sing under such romantic circumstances. She parried all.

"Not even a ballad?" Moritz asked. He involuntarily added in a low voice, "Am I never to hear you sing once more?"

"Not to-night, Herr Reisse," Nadine replied aloud. "It is impossible for me to sing without my pianoforte. As soon as that arrives I will try to make amends for my discourtesy." Then, as if yielding to a sudden impulse, she took advantage of a stir among the rest. She turned her face towards Moritz and said swiftly, "My voice is not yet sufficiently eloquent to please me. It will be soon. Wait."

She resumed her bantering with a gentleman on her left. Moritz scarcely caught the remark. In trying to recall it he could make nothing of it.

A second week succeeded. The more our hero was thrown thus into her companionship the more the old charm began to assert itself. The power of her will bound him. He began to long to identify the woman he had known once with this one that he knew now. How much of the passionate nature still existed underneath any envelope? He was piqued that the Countess should have dismissed him from her heart so arbitrarily.

The next step was natural. When for a brief hour Moritz found himself alone with her, he began deliberately to tread upon the forbidden ground. He began to break the treaty hitherto maintained between them.

Nadine at once discouraged any such tendency on his part. This irritated him. His irritation was wrong. He knew it. He said to himself that he certainly did not wish for the love of Nadine von Gravenhorst to-day. God forbid! Was she not his friend's wife? Was not he himself quite recovered from his unhappy weakness? But surely a decent sensibility toward even a dead passion was expected of any woman, peasant or princess, married or single!

Nadine certainly gave every indication of the most complete insensibility. She showed all the frankness of a friend; but let Moritz once attempt by so much as a glance to suggest to her circumstances which had linked them in other days, heart to heart, he did not receive even the honor of rebuke. He was ignored. That Nadine might be preparing for a more unreserved *laissez aller* when the time was ripe, and one with less tangible fault to herself, Moritz of course did not reflect. He was not good at reading women of this type. He was too easily read by them. If there was any struggle by the Countess, any effort in her self-control, or anxiety as to a plan, nothing of them appeared.

Possibly she went farther in the delicate development of her design than she had intended. By the end of his second lingering week at Gravenhorst Lodge, Moritz Reisse became wearied at the futility of these skirmishings—no, they were not even that. He began to give himself lectures and to ask himself just what he had been about. He would leave Gravenhorst at once, glad he could do so at peace with his friend and his own conscience. Thenceforth his secret with her need never disturb the tranquillity of the three persons concerned. He even began to make flattering speeches to his conscience, and to feel that he was possessor of a good stock of the right Spartan honor. Very small opportunity had there been for him to exercise Spartan or any other kind of honor—but he did not happen to notice that.

"I must leave you on Monday, Alexis," he announced, one morning after the mail had come. "My plans for a stay with you are all overturned. I must go to Berlin."

"Away with your business!" replied Alexis. "Indeed you will not! Don't trouble yourself to explain things

again. Didn't you promise me several weeks at least ? Come ! "

Moritz repeated some tolerable excuses. Alexis disputed them. Moritz remained obstinate. Go he would. Alexis quitted the room a good deal disgusted. Nadine, who had taken only a formal share in the argument, rose from the table. The door closed behind Alexis. The servant was in the next room. She approached Reisse. He raised his eyes. She was standing before him. " You must not go. I cannot spare you forever—yet," she said.

Before he could recover from his confusion at her change of manner, at the accent of command in her voice, which seemed to reveal all that old personality hitherto so repressed, Nadine had left him.

He sat motionless. He had been blind. She still thought of him with more than only dispassionate regard ! In his bewilderment he forgot that this would be the worst of evils. His relations to his friend, his honor, all that might hold his spirit in check grew clouded before him.

There was no painting in the kiosk that morning. At luncheon he did not see Nadine ; she had a slight headache, Alexis said. A long drive with the Count consumed the afternoon. Moritz felt an anticipatory something almost like guilt as he listened abstractedly to his friend's talk. Now he heard nothing but an echo, repeating pathetically—" You must not go—I cannot spare you—forever—yet."

When Alexis and he returned, an agreeable surprise awaited them. The new grand pianoforte had come, and was already in its place. " Hurrah ! " cried Alexis, gaily ; " we will have its christening to-night, Reisse ! I shall notify Nadine."

They separated until dinner. Moritz, left to his own devices, sat at the piano alone a little while and then went up to his own room.

There, free to continue undisturbed his turbulent reflections, he sat down by the open window. Something seemed crying out to him, "A crisis is at hand. Fly, or you are lost!" He began to admit to himself that it would not be unendurable to be lost. And while he sat there, the enchanting landscape extending before his eyes that had been first unfolded to them in the kiosk on the hill, his heart oppressed by a thousand questions as to Nadine and his honor as man and friend—in his memory was unrolled another and very different panorama, reviewed many times before, yet never with such effect, because never recalled in an hour of such evil destiny.

He beheld himself meeting Nadine von Lillienberg for the first time at a dull soirée. He felt again the attraction which made her, in so brief a time, all in all to him. Once again was he hurrying with the step of a thief along a suburban road outside a moonlit city. Once again was he clambering over the broken wall of the Villa Fioraja, or stealing in by the seldom-used gate. His ears caught the rustle of leaves beneath her feet, as Nadine stole down the shadowy walk to the ruined arbor. Her hands met his with trembling greeting. "At last you are here!" There had been the same cadence in her voice then that had this morning betrayed itself in those words, "You must not go —I cannot spare you yet."

His heart began to beat faster. How had he been able to persuade himself that such remembrances no longer awoke a thrill?—or in the bosom of this paler, prouder, but—it must be, it must be!—so little altered Nadine von Lillienberg, or Gravenhorst Lodge?

All at once a fancy seized him. He rose and, crossing the room, brought to light, after some searching, a small olive-wood box which generally accompanied his journeyings. Various valuables were crowded within it—a few jewels and souvenirs, a decoration or two, and several packets of letters. From these last he hastily broke open a tiny, sealed-up group containing, perhaps, only a dozen all told. Not in years had he glanced through these, of all others. He had, indeed, sworn never to do so again. His face flushed, his breast heaved, his eyes filled with a strange tremulous light, as he read the few pages that Nadine had written him in those magical days. Ah, had she once seemed, aye, even *seemed*, to love him thus? Yonder sentence!—that phrase! Could her heart this afternoon be a palimpsest? It was impossible.

And yet there faced him the old question! Why had she refused in that last, supreme hour to become his wife? Oh, wretched conflicting problem that he had so often decided, but that in some way never remained decided!

It is not true that over the ashes of past fires of this sort we ever warm ourselves. We only burn our fingers. Unhappy Moritz! In this hour he was less than ever a cool-brained philosopher to balance *pro* and *con*, to hold to past convictions in the rush of new impulses. He was but the dreaming man of art to whom to wish a thing is sometimes to be all at once convinced of it. That half-hour with Nadine's letters did him remediless mischief. For he put them away believing that he had until that hour misjudged her!—cruelly! She *had* loved him! Her generosity, her prudence, had alone withheld her from joining her fate to his. He had mocked at profound truth. He had sneered at a woman's completest sacrifice. His angry accusation in the summer-house—"Your pride was

greater than your love, then and always!"—made him blush. It was perhaps too late now to admit to her this remorse for the injustice of years; but, should opportunity come before he left, he swore that he would speak. Last of all came once again the sound of her voice that morning: "You must not go, Moritz, I cannot spare you, forever—yet." If she had enjoined upon herself such generous control until now, might she not— ?

He uttered a cry as these new ideas beset him. So beset, everything that was good within him faded and shrivelled. He started up. It was drawing toward evening, for long he had been seated there, sunk in these reveries new and old, but all alike demoralizing. He made a hasty toilet for dinner and left the room quickly.

CHAPTER IX.

"Music oft hath such a charm
To make bad good, and good provoke to harm."
Measure for Measure.

THE shadows in the white hallway and in the garden had already caught the violet tinge of sunset. Moritz stepped out upon the piazza. The Countess stood at its further end. His eye, re-awakened to her beauty, marked the charm of the picture—her graceful figure, in one of her inevitable simply-made white dresses, her left hand filled with the dark-red roses which she leaned forward to cut from a spray beside the balustrade. The blending of white and crimson in the blossoms, her large eyes, which, notwithstanding the lightness of their hazel, were wonderfully luminous — the odd pallor by which her complexion was always distinguished from the tint of any other woman that Moritz Reisse had ever seen—about the entire personality of the Countess, as she turned toward him now, there lingered, as often before, a peculiar suggestion of dormant passion, waiting to be developed. She stood there like a clear, white apparition—a cameo against the green of the garden and the purplish sky.

"I have been a negligent hostess," she said, when he had reached her side; "I have left you solitary all day! A headache is a tyrant with me. I am glad that Alexis found some hours to spend with you. He is generally too engrossed with matters on the estate. What have you done? Written a sonata or a symphony to beguile your solitude?"

"Neither," he answered; "my thoughts have been discords. One's heart-strings cannot always be kept in tune. A musician has his bad quarter of an hour oftener then the rest of the world."

"With the consolation that it may give pleasure to others," returned the Countess, laughing. "A single fritter at dessert and a headache on the morning after an opera-supper have often been at the foundation of the most appealing sonata or moving *romanza!*"

"To call indigestion inspiration is a slander worthy of Alexis."

"A slander? So be it. But," she added, with more seriousness, "let it be a slander born of envy—like most slanders. Heaven forbid, indeed, that I should disparage the privilege granted to your fellowship—you, who find relief from retrospect and prospect, in pursuing your art."

"A relief? Yes, Countess, but never an oblivion! never a consolation for lost happiness—" he hesitated and then added firmly, "for lost love."

Had he yesterday ventured upon so bold a challenge (and he had approached its like more than once) he would have been promptly repelled. To-day she gave him a quick glance of ready divination. Dropping her eyes immediately to the flowers, she said, slowly, "No. A truly great love we do not forget, even at the command of duty, —of prudence."

She looked out over the garden. They stood in silence a moment. Some tardy bird, pausing in its nestward flight, began singing. It was the only interruption to the evening stillness.

"Why have you so persistently refused to sing for any of us this week?" he asked; "piano or no piano, I think

you have made old Counsellor Otto an enemy for life by declining to attempt his 'Vorbei' last Sunday night."

"I thought I gave *you* my reason," she returned, slowly. "You did not catch it perhaps. But, never mind; call it a whim, or what you will, the piano is here now. I have tried it this afternoon, and from this evening you shall have no occasion to complain of me. Almost the first night,—I have been despairing of one," she added, carelessly,—"that we have been alone together—that is, with only Alexis besides! *À propos*, my friend, do you know that I still sing at least two of the songs that you wrote for me? that Polish love song that you set for me, and the ballad, 'Auf Wiedersehen'?"

"You flatter me," said Moritz, in slight embarrassment.

So she still linked herself to the love of the past by one of the strongest of ties—the music of the past. If that was what the Countess had desired him to gather from the trivial, but scarcely necessary, remark, she succeeded. "I dare say," she continued, looking at him with a faint smile, "that many another and sweeter voice has been heard in such music since—your charming friend, Fräulein Ehlert of the Hoftheater, for instance."

"The songs that I wrote for you have not been heard from the lips of Fräulein Ehlert or any other woman except you," Moritz replied, quickly. "Do you think that I have no more heart, no more—" He broke off, not trusting himself.

"You were ever gallant," she said, lightly.

"Gallant!" he exclaimed. "Listen to me, pray, since you yourself have recalled days which it were well we could forget. Let me ask forgiveness for my errors."

Her face grew serious. She gave him a surprised glance, but did not forbid him to go on.

"I have been unjust and blind," Moritz continued, impetuously. "I have come to my senses. Do not ask me under what influences; indeed, I hardly know, myself. As I live, I swear that I believe that you were truest to me when I thought you falsest. I told you that your pride was greater than your love. Forgive me. I wronged you; I feel it."

A smile, half of bitterness, half of mockery, came to her lips.

"You were pardoned long since, Moritz," she answered, gently, "if pardon can now be anything to you. And why vex your soul and mine with what has been put off, like garments whose fashion no longer suits? Have we not agreed that we have too heavy a reproach to lay upon destiny to think hardly of ourselves? The past expiates itself. What burdens us, let it be our care to forget. Better still, if we can regard that love of yesterday as a jest over which friendship to-day, however newly sworn, has a legitimate right to make merry."

"Make merry?" he cried. "Not I, indeed! Have not you yourself said that to the memory of a true passion we never can become entirely indifferent? No man—no woman, dare mock so holy a memory."

"And do you then really believe, Moritz, that love is ever a holy feeling? Are we not merely divine animals, after all, and love a possible heritage, with so much else, from the quadrupeds? You are shocked, I see, at my cynicism. Ah, Moritz," she exclaimed, "have you yet to learn that at what we dare not weep over we must laugh? Come, a jest, a jest for friendship—behold our watchword! We are agreed, are we not—as all sworn allies ought to be?" Her voice lost its irony for that deeper cadence with which so many women seem to begin, all at once, to speak

from their hearts. "Be satisfied with me. It is too late for me ever to be satisfied with myself."

The voice of Alexis, as his friend appeared, saved Moritz the impulsive reply. He reddened at the sight of Alexis, who advanced down the piazza.

"Ha, ha! Here you both are, I declare," he cried, gayly.

Some experiments in progress on one of the farms had that day given signs of uncommon success. Gravenhorst was in enthusiastic spirits. He began at once to banter Moritz on the waste of time spent in writing an opera, compared with the value of bringing a field of cauliflowers to full perfection, until he finally was interrupted by Moritz's satiric question, if he actually believed art did no good in the world?

It was not until the three were seated at the table in the great bow-windowed dining-room that Alexis answered the question.

* "What's that you were saying about art doing any good in the world?" he asked. "It depends upon what you mean by 'good'? Do you ask whether I believe in a moral and intellectual good in your music? Indeed I don't. There never was a more utter absurdity."

"Or a more widespread one, then," interrupted Nadine, glad of something to furnish talk.

"Admitted," replied Alexis—"and an especial article of faith to your sex, Nadine. There is any quantity of people to-day who will endow music with a positively religious influence."

* Since the ensuing views of the Count von Gravenhorst in regard to the tendency of music and art in general were thus recorded, the present writer has had his attention called to an extract from an American critic's brief discussion of the relations of art and ethics, in which, so far as music is concerned, like views with von Gravenhorst's are more positively set forth.

"And why shouldn't they?" asked Moritz, hotly. "Hasn't it always been a powerful element in enlightened religion from the remotest period? Is not its very existence and development partly the outgrowth of religion? Has not the world as Romanist its masses and vespers, and as Protestant its chants and hymns."

"Which, simply and solely as associated with the text, can be of any moral influence. You might as well play the scales up and down to all eternity and expect to transform human nature and evolve morality. The sublimest mass does not inspire devotion, man. The noblest chorale does not amend the soul!"

"What do they bring about, then?" asked Moritz, laughing.

"Oh, a sensuous enjoyment, more or less acute; a nervous effect like to that of the drums and trumpets in the soldiers' breasts on the battle-field. And, see here, my dear child of art," continued von Gravenhorst; "it has been said till the words are stale that your high-priests and priestesses of music, and those favored men and women who live in the focus of art's influence, ought to be superior in virtue and in every lofty trait of character. That is, if there be in the music, for example, an elevating moral principle. As you run over the list of the greater composers, it seems to one that there are altogether too many exceptions for anyone to try to prove the rule."

"Has Palestrina's music, Bach's—Mozart's--Beethoven's—been surpassed?" retorted Moritz, "and does the moralist find much to censure in their lives? Here too, is your father's old friend and your own, Herr Meyerbeer."

"Their art has nothing to do with it. In their cases, and many others, virtue, inborn or acquired, has been too stout to be sapped by the enervating enemy."

"So you think an appreciative nature comes away from hearing a great symphony no better than if one never entered the concert-room?" said the Countess.

"A man may appreciate music as intensely as never before, during that very performance, and be just as ready to pick your pocket as you come down the staircase. The orchestra's message cannot reinforce his morals."

"And yet," said the Countess, reflectively, "sometimes one realizes in music a consolation, even a forgetfulness of grief. There is that much good in art, at least, whatever there is not."

"That much good. But therein not a whit of moral good; and nothing more altogether than a certain emotional influence which affords one no enduring peace."

"To a true musician, Alexis," she rejoined, "we are told that there should be nothing for which art will not console."

"Reisse, will your conscience support you in that?" her husband laughed back. "Oh, no, you needn't answer."

A glance flashed between Moritz and Nadine. Twice within the hour had this same consolation of art been mentioned. Had there been nothing for which his art and his success had not atoned? Or was he no true musician? Nadine's eyes had asked his one of the two questions and read the reply.

"You say that art, music, are negative," he said, turning to Alexis. "Go further. Maintain that either one absolutely degrades."

"Precisely," Alexis answered, complacently. "In regard to this vexed problem of music and morals, morals and music, art and morals—to broaden it—the difficulty with the question is that, like a statue of Janus, it pre-

sents two faces in a peculiarly uncompromising manner —an agreeable theory and a painful fact; too few people who stand at one angle, and study and descant, will shift their ground and study the other aspect. But in all the history of civilization of the human species, art dominates and develops a people to destroy it. The philosophy of it is obscure. To many it appears to involve only a strange, cruel, insolvable paradox. Better let it rest so. Eh, Reisse?"

Moritz laughed good-naturedly. The topic was about to change. But Nadine suddenly spoke.

"Let me submit a last question. Imagine a man who thoroughly knows right from wrong, and naturally appreciates the beauty of honor and goodness. Now, by nature, he is the keenest possible enjoyer of the beautiful, and a successful practical man of art, a painter, a musician—what you will. Put him where only moral principle can make him keep his footing. Will the artist element in him weaken him for contest? Will he fall the sooner because of it? I don't ask if that side of his character, directly or indirectly, holds him up. Will it—drag him down?"

She spoke slowly, choosing her words. Alexis moved back from the table. He laughed undisguisedly.

"You have sketched one of the most truly artistic or, rather, musical of temperaments, to borrow the cant phrase. I would not wager many rows of pins for its stability."

"My unlucky friend falls then?" Nadine asked, gravely.

"The more readily; the deeper. *Requiescat in pace.*"

"No," exclaimed Nadine, "not his epitaph yet! I do not surrender him. He struggles manfully. The influence of his art over his nature nobly assists him to

triumph, because it is in its very purity a part of a pure nature."

"*Requiescat in pace,*" repeated Alexis, with solemn obstinacy.

She looked up into her husband's face and exclaimed, "Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

Alexis smiled still more exasperatingly. "*Requi—es—*" he began again.

She burst out into a sharp, cynical laugh of agreement. "So be it! *Requiescat in pace!*" cried she. "You will have it so. *Soyons amis, Cinna.*"

The three pushed back their chairs.

"Come to the music-room, Reisse," cried the Count. "There I shall belie my own lost appreciation of music by listening with pleasure while you and Nadine entertain an audience of one. What a pity we are like to have no guests this evening!"

He led the way across the hall, his wife and his friend following.

CHAPTER X.

"I love you now; but not till now so much
But I might master it."

Troilus and Cressida.

As the three passed into the long drawing-room, with its dark rugs and heavy upholstery, "Here is that odd effort of Nadine's fancy that I spoke of the other afternoon," Alexis said; and he held the candles before a picture, arresting their progress. "I like it extremely," he remarked.

Moritz examined the small canvas, obscure in the indifferent light. It represented a group of musicians, playing by candle-light a string-quartet. The chiaroscuro of their four faces in the interrupted light falling on them in a little room was excellently depicted. Moritz praised it warmly.

"There is a sort of companion-piece over in that alcove," remarked Alexis; "but the alcove is so dark that I have paid less attention to it, and I like this one as well. What did you finally call it, Nadine?"

"'The Duet,'" the Countess answered, adding quickly: "I will delay Herr Reisse to look at it, while you make the music-room a little brighter."

Her husband put one candle into her hand and walked away with the other.

"Thank you; let me hold it," she said, and guided Moritz to the alcove. This second picture, like its mate a small canvas, offered an even simpler musical scene. Moritz noticed merely a young man in the court dress of the last century, and his companion, a lady. The latter stood before

a harpsichord, on which her cavalier was playing an accompaniment to his own singing. But what at once struck Reisse was another reversal of a common order of things. The listener, holding the tall silver candlestick in a peculiar position, was contriving to keep her own face in the shadow while she studied fixedly the singer's profile, with an expression as suggestive as it was well portrayed. Moritz instantly recognized both portraits, although both were designedly obscured.

With what thoughts must she have bent over that canvas!

"When did you paint it?" he asked, after a moment.

"Not long ago," she replied, adding tremulously, "Do not be alarmed. No one can read it as can you and I."

"Is this another jest for friendship?" he asked, not withdrawing his eyes from the painting.

There was no reply. He turned and looked into her face. The look he met was the original of that upon the painted face above. He could not speak.

"Come, prima-donna; come, virtuoso!" cried Alexis, from the music-room.

They started guiltily and turned abruptly from the picture.

Various portfolios of music Alexis had already brought forth, hap-hazard. "We may expect a treat," he exclaimed to Nadine, and threw himself into an arm-chair. "Reisse can play like Rossini."

"The 'fourth-rate pianist,' as he used to delight to call himself," said Moritz, smiling.

Nadine sat down mechanically. She was trembling. She dreaded the effect upon her self-control of the spell woven of old by Moritz Reisse's fingers. Yet, perhaps the time was ripe for her wisely to yield to the most genuine

emotions—when it would be hard to say what was nature, what simulation, with her.

Moritz too was inwardly curiously disquieted. There is sometimes a certain almost sacramental solemnity in a musician's first playing, after a lapse of years, for one who has been long ago a part of his life and music, and the real listener alone played to, once upon a time, no matter how many other auditors used to be present. At Alexis' request, he suddenly broke off his badinage, turned about with a serious face, and began to play a sonata of Mozart's, the one in A major, with its lovely chain of variations.

He had been debating for several minutes whether he could and would choose it, for this piece had grown during their old days to be a watchword, a signal, and pregnant to them both with meanings in almost every bar. What musician has not the like piece in his portfolio or memory, to play which, or to hear played, is everything between delight and pain, since each measure bears an inaudible burden? His fingers trembled as he began. But his touch grew steadier, and he finished the lovely coda with exquisite effect. Alexis burst into violent applause. "You play better than ever; better than when I heard you in B—— last May. Nadine, Nadine! why so silent? Render to genius its meed! You have enchanted her, I see, Reisse. Behold, behold a fair and witty lady, speechless!"

But she scarcely opened her lips, so profound was the feeling this music had stirred in her. Moritz played again at Alexis' request. She murmured some ordinary compliments. The player did not require them. He mirrored her emotions in his own. He had begun to think all that she would have him think.

He finished a fantasia that called for downright virtuosity, in a style that put Alexis into ecstasies.

"Oh, Reisse, Reisse!" he exclaimed, "there is nobody like you—nobody! To think of all this being wasted on a barbarian like myself! Only a single one of the elect present! You have got the same old fiends in your fingers and devil at your elbow, there is no mistake about that!"

Reisse slipped from the piano during these and similar incoherent laudations. "Am not I too to be entertained?" he asked, after a moment. "Something more than even flattering speeches is due me. Countess, you will not refuse to sing to-night?"

"Of course she will not, now that the piano is here," replied Alexis, quickly. "Nadine, try that odd Polish ballad you picked up in Berlin, that I always had such a fancy for."

It was an odd coincidence. Nadine could not refuse her husband's request had she been ever so reluctant to yield to it, and reluctant she no longer was. But she feared that song more than speech. She went to a portfolio and took thence an air in manuscript, a copy in her own hand, from an unsigned original which Moritz Reisse had written for her long ago. He knew the accompaniment by heart, though he sat down feigning to read it for the first time.

Perhaps never in her life did Nadine sing anything as she did that song. Was Alexis lucky or unlucky, that he could not see how it affected the two at his side? He only applauded vigorously.

"Upon my word, you are both inspired to-night!" he cried. "An artistic Pentecost is come upon you, and I only have grieved away all such influences. Sing once again—only once, Nadine! No? Well, then, Moritz, do you play once more; then we will let you off. And improvise something—do! You used to be great at improvising, and you seem to be in a capital humor for it."

Moritz Reisse never could recall a theme or measure of the improvisation that indeed followed. It gave him what no other man's music could furnish—spontaneous, free vent for emotion. It was an astonishment even to himself. If ever a human spirit at sudden war with itself, struggling with a passion, momentarily beating it down, crying out over the divine past, despairing of equal joy for the future, imploring fate to lighten its chaos, and shaken with the fiery consciousness that Love again was lord of it, expressed itself in music, the spirit of Moritz Reisse did during that wonderful quarter of an hour. Alexis waited spell-bound. Moritz was drawing to an end, with the rush of his persistent, eloquent theme reiterated in stormy harmony. Nadine sat in the shadow of the piano, her lips set, and her hand once more clenched around the arm of the chair. She uttered a low cry. Her head fell back. She had fainted.

"Quick," cried Alexis, darting to his wife's support—"that water yonder! So! There is a *chaise-longue* by the door! This thing is not so very unusual. Carefully! She is curiously emotional—like all your kind of people," he added, a little maliciously.

With Moritz' aid he half led, half carried his wife into the drawing-room to the sofa. She seemed to be making a struggle not to lose her consciousness entirely. She opened her eyes heavily on them as she leaned back upon the sofa.

"That fan, Reisse; I must find her salts!" cried Alexis, running out of the room.

Moritz turned to Nadine. They were alone. Her eyes met his, encountering the sympathy and ardor of the young man's look. He took her hand and covered it with kisses. She made no resistance. With an unex-

pressed tenderness in her touch, the slender fingers of her other hand, outstretched, glided caressingly through his dark hair. "Moritz," she said. Only one word, his name—but in what a cadence!

Alexis came hastening downstairs, followed by Nadine's maid. Moritz started back and sat down by Nadine's side. The Count entered the room.

"Aha—better already, I see!" he exclaimed, manipulating the vinaigrette with dexterous and gentle solicitude. "Reisse, you lucky fellow, to be playing in a warm room, on a warm evening, with one half of your audience scarcely recovered from a sick headache! What an extra compliment it helps to pay to your powers! I shall have to interdict those long mornings in the kiosk, Nadine. Such things are the result."

Nadine smiled faintly and began declaring that she was quite herself again. It was all the heat of the music-room, she said. She would go to her room at once, and be ready to atone for this absurdity on the morrow. They went upstairs together. In separating, Nadine gave Moritz her hand. It was now feverishly hot.

"Until to-morrow," she said.

"Until to-morrow," he repeated, with some conventional phrases. "Good-night, Alexis."

He turned into his own apartment. The moon flooded it. Alone at last, he locked the door and threw himself down in a fever of excitement. Through what successive stages of emotion his heart that day had passed! Well—they alike ended in one climax. He loved her. He had never ceased to love her. And she loved him, as of old, —and was the wife of his friend.

CHAPTER XI.

"What's this? What's this? Is this her fault or mine?
The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?"
Measure for Measure.

MORITZ scarcely rested well on the night of that episode. His face was a little haggard when he came down to breakfast. Nadine looked as composed and serene as usual. She and Moritz, however, rather avoided mutual glances, although they chatted unceasingly with Alexis, who was in his most bluff and genial spirits. He was quite disposed to rally his wife and friend on the scene of the preceding evening. But Nadine quietly checked such pleasantries.

The three were still at the table when the day's letters arrived. Nadine took up some addressed to her, Alexis opened the B—— *Zeitung*, and Moritz broke the seals of a bulky MS. directed to him.

"Reisse, your friend, Fräulein Ehlert, has returned to B—— from Wasserthal," said Alexis, running his eye over the personal column of the journal. "H'm—with her, also Baron and Baroness Brandt and family. Fräulein Ehlert has quite carried by storm the gay world at the Baths, judging from this letter here. Somebody writes that 'Society is enchanted with her charming voice and graceful simplicity of manner.' The correspondent is certainly enchanted himself."

"Society well may be," replied Moritz, with all of his accustomed indifference of manner when Elsa's name was mentioned. Ah, how had he been carried degree by degree away from grace! How entirely had he ceased to think of

those weeks of pure and pleasant companionship! Seeming to him already unreal and distant, their memory seldom flitted now through his tempest-tossed heart. It was fitting. In such a tranquil sphere he could have had no abiding existence.

"It seems odd to me that you didn't prosecute that acquaintance as fully as you had a right to," remarked Nadine, looking up. "You certainly must have found a thousand opportunities."

"Oh, I met her frequently, on and off the stage, of course," replied Moritz, coldly. "She did not particularly attract me, though I must say she appeared to me pleasant-mannered and highly gifted."

Nadine laughed. She had not guessed the past, and could not read the near future in which she and Elsa Ehlert were again to oppose influence against influence, and wage war for a stake, the highest to be played for. She glanced at the manuscript before Moritz. "That is hardly a billet-doux that you have there."

"No, it is the libretto I expected from Berlin."

"Ah, your libretto!" exclaimed Alexis. "Then you cannot make that your excuse for leaving us so cavalierly as you threatened."

"I am not going," Moritz answered, abruptly—"if you have not cancelled my invitation. This changes my plans very happily."

No! He would not go now, come what might. Nadine seconded Alexis in his hospitable speeches, with her face suddenly flushed and her eyes filled with a deep gratitude.

"Tell me," asked Alexis presently, eying the sheets before Moritz, "what subject, after all, did you ask your friend to dramatize for you? I forget."

"Paris and Helen," answered Moritz.

"Paris and Helen?" Nadine repeated, lightly. "You have chosen a popular episode, I am afraid, even if it is a far cry back to Troy. How many men, I wonder," she went on, with jesting bravado, "have fallen in love with their friends' wives since then?—since the beginning of the world?"

"Adam has always been above suspicion," laughed Alexis, "and his was a *mariage de convenance.*"

"How do you know that Adam was always above suspicion?" returned Nadine. "The world grew up around Adam. It must have become, soon enough, pretty much the world of to-day."

"I dare say!—just as men and women gave up the idea that it was possible to do right, when the impulse toward evil happened to be particularly strong."

"You are not very charitable," replied his wife, musingly.

"Especially," interpolated Moritz, "as I remember your declaring, over and over again, long ago (when you were half a musician and wholly a romancist) that absolute love required no apology, and that humanity, in its respect, was simply the sport and the prey of the gods."

"Did I?" queried Alexis. "Well, I didn't know what I was talking about in any case, perhaps because," he added, smiling, "I had not met Nadine here, at that time." His frank eyes turned affectionately upon his wife.

"Alexis," she asked, suddenly facing him, "suppose that you were some modern Menelaus, and that Paris, your very dear guest and friend, turned your silly wife's head and compassed that memorable elopement. Would you sing an aria, *furioso*, and rouse the Greeks to Troy?"

Alexis smiled and twirled his mustache. "No," he replied, slowly. "If I cared little for my wife and less for

my dishonor I don't say that I would not invoke Agamemnon and Achilles and the rest. But that is a classical and far-away proceeding. When a husband of our epoch loves his wife as he should, and is robbed of her love, there is generally but one wise thing for him to do."

"To kill Paris, of course!" exclaimed Moritz. "Stick to antiquity, pray. Old, my dear Alexis; old and trite!"

"To kill Helen," said Nadine, in a reflective tone. "She is the one in fault. So you men tell us. Or, let him kill both Paris and Helen?" she added.

"In my philosophy Menelaus kills—himself," responded Alexis.

"Kills himself!" exclaimed Moritz, with a slight start. "Your code will be hard to popularize."

"More shame to the race, then," answered von Gravenhorst, smiling coldly, "for the difficulty betrays the stuff of which modern men are made. I don't urge my course, mind you, on any man who has not loved his wife supremely, trusted her completely, and believed in her supreme regard for himself. Look now—let the unlucky fellow kill the lover, she will hate him. Let him kill her, remorse ought to drive him mad; and in the death of the two he gains nothing. No, the world is for them, not him! The sooner he takes his inconvenient existence somewhere else, out of their way, the better."

A short silence followed. Alexis had spoken with a matter-of-fact conviction that grated disagreeably on his auditors. "Well, we will forego the subject; you would have to effect a classical revolution in society," Nadine said, rather petulantly. And they rose and passed out upon the piazza behind the dining-room, a pleasant tarrying-place of a forenoon.

"Am I to have the society of either or of both of you in

the summer-house this morning?" Nadine asked, hesitatingly.

"I have some people to see with Bischoff—to pay too, for that matter," Alexis answered.

"My acquaintance with this must be a good deal improved before luncheon time," Moritz responded, holding up the libretto, "if you will both excuse me. Thanks for your offer of the music-room, but I shall shut myself upstairs, instead."

He shrank from any immediate *tête-à-tête* with Nadine. It would come soon enough. She bowed politely. After a caution from her husband against another headache, the trio separated. Nadine disappeared up the path to the summer-house. Alexis walked down an avenue. Moritz went to his room.

He put himself on a settee by the window and began, first of all, to read his friend's text, setting forth a subject quaint indeed for any modern opera. At first his thoughts strayed often enough from the page before him. Scenes and discoveries of yesterday and varying passions and purposes of to-day distracted his faculties. But as he continued, and the excellence of the poem became manifest, his attention deepened. He began to see, as in a dream, not the amorous young shepherd of Mount Ida, not the haughty husband and faithless queen—but himself, Moritz Reisse—Alexis von Gravenhorst—and Nadine. The three blended together, floating shapes of fancy. He laid down the book—then took it up again. Sentence after sentence had been calling forth its musical expression within his brain.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, "if I keep on reading it in music I may as well get to writing at once!" He sat down by his table, already covered with loose music-paper, and began to sketch a number in his work. In a few mo-

ments he was absorbed, lost in the oblivion of genius toward everything except that which it is every instant creating.

It was veritably himself, Moritz Reisse, and Nadine and Alexis von Gravenhorst who were put into the pages begun that summer day; perhaps the greatest music that Moritz Reisse was destined to conceive. He wrote it, then and afterward, as a man dreaming dreams and seeing visions. He did not in spirit go back unto the days of Troy. He brought the fugitive lovers, the wronged king, up from the shades to Gravenhorst. Inspiration, hitherto denied him in any measure, or so notably lacking in the graceful, flippant "Prinz Max," came to him at last. This was truly music that "makes itself," like a fire within the spirit, as Moritz sketched and filled out one page after another, scene by scene, act by act, of his first great score. It seemed to him during the time he spent on it that summer at Gravenhorst that he had never composed before. And whatever may be argued from a work so inspired, one thing is, perhaps, certain, that the library of the collector does not offer to-day a nobler score, with purer melodies and more enchanting harmonies, than this matchless "Paris and Helen," written under the influence of a man's guilty passion for the wife of his best friend. From the corrupt carcass of a dead lion there has more than once come the wild sweets of the forest swarm.

He was served in his own room at luncheon. Then he continued his task almost furiously. Not until late in the afternoon did he drop his pen for that day, too exhausted to hold it longer. His first act was well begun.

Evening came. At dinner he was received with much badinage from Alexis on his sudden application, and a great many questions from the same source as to the last state of Græco-Trojan affairs. The Countess did not join her husband in these drolleries. She was silent during

almost all the time they were at the table. Afterwards, when they were seated in the darkness out on the lawn for a little while, "Again I envy you," she contrived to say to Moritz, softly.

"You are certainly not going to work to-night, Reisse," said Alexis, taking his cigar out of his mouth, as Moritz presently rose abruptly from his rustic seat.

"Not on 'Paris and Helen,'" replied Moritz. "I have two or three letters that must be despatched early to-morrow. I shall be down again in an hour."

He moved away in the blackness.

"A good fellow, Moritz," said Alexis to Nadine, after a moment. He dropped his arm along the back of the bench on which they were seated. "Isn't he a capital crony for a man of symphonies and sonnets?"

"Delightfully clever and entertaining," replied Nadine, cordially. "More so, far, than most musicians. For I doubt if I have ever cared for purely artistic companionship as much as you have given me credit for."

"A trifle more, then, for the society of such people as an everyday farmer-husband?" said Alexis, taking one of the hands whitely visible in the darkness. "More than he has given you credit for? That is kind of you, dear." He kissed her hand lightly, adding, "Ah, if all the arts in the world and some hitherto undiscovered could but teach me to tell my wife how I love her!"

Nadine made no reply. She offered no resistance to her husband's caress. There was again silence, Alexis relapsing into that undemonstrativeness usual with him. He relinquished the hand and resumed a vigorous puffing at his cigar. Nadine kept her position at her husband's side, with her chin resting upon her palm and her eyes looking forward into the gloom.

Suddenly a faint flash lit the horizon toward the north. An equally faint mutter of thunder followed. Alexis started. "Pfui!" he exclaimed—"a storm on its way? I don't like that. Those clogged drains in the lower meadows will be flooded." Presently another flash made visible an edge of black cloud. At the same moment a dark figure approached them.

"Markus, is that you?" asked Alexis, recognizing by the tall figure a son of the land-steward, Bischoff.

"Yes, sir," replied the young man; "my father would be glad to see the Herr Count yonder. My uncle Kunz, at the Ravine Farm, is worse this evening. We fear he cannot live till morning. He has sent a message to the Herr Count, by my father, about coming down to the Farm."

"Where is your father? On the avenue? Well, I'll find him at once. Nadine, you had better go over to the piazza. Don't wait here in the dark. I'll join you in a few moments."

CHAPTER XII.

"Good now, play one scene
Of excellent dissembling; and let it look
Like perfect honor."

Antony and Cleopatra.

THE Countess complied listlessly. Alexis followed Markus around the corner of the house. A murmur of voices presently reached her. Nadine paused beside a column at the top of the steps. A graceful, ghostly figure in her white toilet, she looked up at the stars. "I am no longer under my good one," she said to herself. "It has set forever, I fancy." She changed her position, and glanced toward the wing. A light burned in Moritz's room. "Nor are you it," she added, apostrophizing it—"although I swear you shall not be my evil one." She began to sing softly the Polish ballad.

Alexis approached the steps. "Nadine," he began, hastily, "it seems that poor Kunz Bischoff, who used to look after me so kindly in my breakneck scrapes as a boy, and who has been such a capital fellow on the estate, is very low to-night. I told you how ill he has been. The poor old man is in great distress about his will. He is very anxious to see me again, and what not. I am going to ride down to the lower Ravine Farm, with Bischoff and Markus. I'll get back within a couple of hours—no, nearer three. The storm may come up in the meantime and delay me. Perhaps I shall find that I ought to spend some part of the night down there—Kunz's affairs may need straightening out. If so, you need not be exercised."

"Very well," replied Nadine; "I shall not be lonely. I will make myself comfortable in the music-room for the evening."

"I shall ask Reisse to be expeditious in joining you," said Alexis, going within the house. He returned in his riding-clothes and with his waterproof on his arm. "Don't either of you sit up later than you choose. There is really no telling how long I may be. If I can, I will send you some kind of a message, however." He rode away, accompanied by Bischoff and Markus.

Nadine sat quietly on the piazza some little time after his departure. Presently she went into the house and to the empty music-room. Her listlessness was over. She began walking about the small apartment with a restless step—the step of a caged leopard. The air had grown very still. The scent of her roses was wafted heavily from the garden. She opened a casement, first on this side, then on that, and leaned out a moment. A haze had already overspread the stars. She closed the blinds and began turning over some music on the pianoforte.

Moritz Reisse came down the drawing-room slowly, with his eyes fixed on the bending figure in white—the blood-red flowers in her hair and bosom.

"Alexis interrupted you," said Nadine, smiling, as he entered. "It was absurd in him, but he would do it, in spite of my remonstrances. Don't spoil your evening. I am quite equal to spending one alone."

"My letters were written, thank you," replied Moritz. "We will not let time oppress us very severely. What can I do to entertain you?"

He felt near at hand the moment when confession must burst from his lips. But he must restrain himself until fairly, unmistakably it was arrived. For, from it, he and

his friend's wife must be thenceforth to one another their true selves, whether he or she should first confess the truth—"I love you, I love you!"

"Play to me," said Nadine, sinking into a seat near the piano. "I deserve to save my reputation as a listener after last night, when—" She was abruptly silent.

Reisse obeyed. But it was plain that he was hardly in a virtuoso's mood this second evening. He played several pages in quick succession from the first book at hand. Nadine remained motionless, her beautiful head and perfect throat thrown a little back, her eyes partly closed. Moritz could feel her veiled gaze resting upon him.

After a little he sprang up. "I am not worth listening to!" he exclaimed. "My hands are wood to-night. Stay—have you any of our old duets that we used to play together in Milan?"

She rose and opened a portfolio, one evidently kept by itself.

"Certainly. They are all here," she said. "Do you prefer this—or this? Do you remember?"

He placed some music upon the piano. Nadine sat down by his side. They began together. How long it was since they had sat thus, her slender white fingers side-by-side with his darker but scarcely less lithe ones! How often in days that were done had *primo* and *secondo* been interrupted, as the lovers had united those same hands in some eloquent pressure, to which an embrace had succeeded!

Neither spoke now more than an occasional word. Page after page was turned. That first duet ended, Moritz opened another, not pausing for his partner's consent. They played that also. A third succeeded—the last of those he had taken from the portfolio. As the final sad

chords of this one—an arrangement of a Scandinavian romance—ceased to vibrate, the Countess shivered.

"No more, Moritz!" she exclaimed. "No more! But it has been like the old evenings—has it not?" Moritz did not answer. "What nonsense I talk!" she said, sharply, glancing at him and rising from the instrument.

He also quitted it. But she suddenly returned, and seating herself alone before it on the bench he had left, began harmonizing with one hand and shadowing her face with the other.

Presently she looked np at Moritz, standing at the other end of the piano, affecting to glance at the music she had left there. She brought her hands down on the key-board with an angry discord of a dozen notes. "Moritz!" she exclaimed, "let me ask you a question. Answer it in friendship. Do you find me greatly changed from the days when you and I used to play those duets together?"

"Changed?" he repeated, in some uncertainty.

"Stop—I want no idle compliments. I wish you to tell me whether Nadine von Gravenhorst appears to you much more tranquil, at peace with herself, less capricious, better controlled than Nadine von Lillienberg. For I ought —I ought to have won much from years and the bitter experiences they have brought me!"

"I find you changed in nothing," said he, quickly, "nothing that rendered you charming. Perhaps, however, this is because I thought I knew you, understood something of you then; and now I do not and have no right to."

"Alas, I am far less at peace with myself, Moritz," she replied, with a sigh. "Certainly life yields me daily less and less happiness, whatever were my past burdens."

"You are dissatisfied?" returned Moritz. "Yet no one has apparently less outward cause to be unhappy."

"Less outward cause!" she repeated. "You speak truly. Yet perhaps I am not so much unhappy, Moritz," she continued, "as still too largely my old self, indeed; that self whom you—began to know. I am so weary of comparing existence, as I find it, with dreams of what it was to have been. I wonder if you remember," she went on, rising from the piano and walking nervously across the room, and back, "what I used to tell you—about my feeling within me a passionate impulse constantly impelling me toward the Bad, and quite as constantly opposed by some nameless principle which I am yet sure is not the Good, but which is also my very nature, and which, ever combating the other, saves me from it, yet never subdues it. Oh, I have sometimes cried out, Moritz, that I would perish, body and soul, to obtain that rest, it must be that happiness, which I am certain exists for me, as an ally of Evil alone. I used to feel, I feel now, like some animal that with wise guidance could be trained to quiet and to good, but to be so trained and guided demands some stronger and new force which I shall never encounter. I ought to be lashed, beaten into subjection! Ah, I anticipate your question. Yes, Alexis has quite power and judgment enough to master me. I care enough for him to permit him. But alas!—his joyous, well-balanced nature has never comprehended the secret storm and stress of so ill-regulated a personality as mine. I should as soon expect emotion enough from him to appreciate the depth in me as—passion from a flute, to borrow a figure from the orchestra."

"Fire must in truth be fought by fire," replied Moritz. "The day in which one such soul meets another yet more passionate it will lose itself in it and be at rest. That is the old reply."

Footsteps approaching in the hall interrupted them. A

knock—the portiere was raised, and a servant entered.

"A note sent up from the Ravine Farm from the Herr Count," he announced. Nadine opened it. She read it aloud :

"'Dearest Nadine. I find that I can do good by remaining here, possibly all night; certainly until toward morning. Old Kunz is sinking rapidly, and they are in great affliction. There is going to be a hard storm, I fancy, and Paulus will just about get this up to you in time. Goodnight.—A.'

"Very well," she said, turning to the servant. "Your master will not return until late. Are all except Caspar and yourself gone up? Are you sure? Very good; then tell Caspar not to wait till the Count returns. You may close all the house except these two rooms and then go to bed yourself."

The man's steps died away. She turned to Moritz and resumed the conversation. "Another soul yet more passionate?" she reiterated, bitterly. "Oh, I have already come near to meeting some such. They lie behind me! I am committed. It is too late for me to hope."

Her presence and words were fast conquering his self-control. Since the preceding night's discoveries he had realized that it would be measured by hers.

"Do not speak so," he exclaimed. He checked himself with a cry of pain, and glanced at his hand. Two of her favorite roses lay upon the pile of music, and a thorn had sunk itself in his finger.

"You are wounded!" she exclaimed, compassionately, "and through me. Is the thorn still there?"

She came up to him, as if with a certain reluctance, and put out her hand, at the same time unfastening a tiny gold bodkin from the bosom of her gown.

"Are you brave enough to bear a little pain? Let me be your surgeon."

He felt himself trembling and burning as they stood face to face, with her fingers clasping his wrist.

"It is in deep, I fear," she said, bending over the hand and beginning with delicate address to extract his tormentor.

He felt every atom of blood in his body begin to glow. Nadine, too, blushed and seemed to grow suddenly confused. She felt the quick beating of his pulse.

"I am awkward," she murmured; "yet there!—behold your suffering at an end!"—and she brushed away the intruder from the point of her improvised probe. Moritz did not move. The fatal instant of his overthrow was here. Nadiné looked up into his face. "You do not thank me," she said. Her eyes encountered his own, brimming with irresistible passion. He seized her hands before she could have turned from him, had she tried.

"Nadine," he cried, "a thorn is still there!—has been my torment all these years! Do you not read the tale retold in every look? I love you!—I love you!"

He drew her within his arms and kissed her. Nadine seemed to rest in his embrace as in a trance. Her head lay upon his arm. Her upturned face was absolutely white. Her eyes were closed.

At that same instant came a flash of lightning. A peal of thunder broke the momentous stillness outside. A deluge of rain announced that the storm, so long creeping up unperceived, had made its advent.

The sudden uproar was like the breaking of a charm. Nadine started to her feet as if recalled to herself, and opened her wild eyes.

"Let me go!" she cried, in a low voice, freeing herself from his arms. "Let me save myself and you! O God! the tempest without—the tempest within!"

"Nadine!" cried Moritz, imploringly—"listen to me!"

"I must not, I dare not listen!" she answered, standing tremblingly, at a distance. "Must I not seal within my lips all that I would reply? Alas, Moritz! this fatal night when your love and mine could no longer be checked!"

He would have burst out again. With half a sob, "Stop," she cried, "stop! I must have time to control myself, before you speak. I tell you, I am terrified—well may I be! Our silence is broken—our comedy is over! We can act no more." Her last words came in an accent of profound regret. "I must have a moment to think before we drop our masks forever."

She sat down in a low chair by the oak table in the centre of the room. Leaning her trembling arms upon this, and covering her face with her hands, she seemed indeed to be striving to collect her thoughts. If she expected a reply of any sort from Moritz, none came. He stood where she had left him, regarding her with perplexity and passion. The rain and the wind dashed furiously in the park. The incessant lightning made pale the single flickering wax-light remaining unextinguished on the table.

At length Nadine raised her head again. Her face had all at once grown sharp under the effort she had been making—of whatever character that effort might have been. "Moritz," she said, in a calm voice, "you love me, you have said. Worse still, you know that I love you, that I have never ceased to love you, and must love you while I live. Alas, that it is true, that it is too late! But," she continued, rising, "my honor, the honor of my husband, your own honor, saves me from you, saves you. Forget what

has occurred. I—I forgive it. We must part now, else all is lost for two unhappy souls. You see it. Leave here to-morrow. No—not a word more. Good-night—God help us to forget one another!" She stopped, caught her breath as if in pain, and drawing her white wrap about her, turned toward the door into the hall.

Moritz uttered a broken cry of passion and anger. But her tone checked him. "One last word," he cried, imploringly, stretching out his hand despairingly. "Do you, do you indeed love me? Nadine, Nadine! End at last my miserable doubt!"

Her hand trembled against the door-post. She leaned toward him, standing there with a power in her expression which startled him. "Love you? Moritz! Ah, do not look at me! I cannot bear your eyes! They burn me, they devour me! Know once again, Moritz, for the last time, that I love you with every fibre of my nature, with a love that can know no end and no respite—with a love that impels me to fly from you now, lest—"

Before Moritz could oppose word or gesture, she turned, threw aside the portiere and glided from the room. He uttered an exclamation, stood for an instant in bewilderment, and then followed her. The thick hanging fell behind him. A fresh gust extinguished the light. The music-room was left empty and in darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

"*Ant.*—I'll leave you, lady.
Cleo. Courteous lord, one word.
Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it:
Sir, you and I have loved; but there's not it."
Antony and Cleopatra.

It was the first week in September. The oaks and chestnuts of Gravenhorst Park were beginning to whisper to one another that the time of their pride was over. The outside air, if daily still more bracing, was warm at five in the afternoon in the kiosk on the hill—in which pleasant shelter, flecked with yellow dashes of diminishing sunshine, they sat listessly one afternoon.

The summer had wrought an ill change in Moritz. There had come shadows beneath the eyes. His voice had lost its pleasant note. On his forehead a slight frown often hovered, and suggestions of restlessness and ennui and care. With an open book half-fallen from his hand, his figure thrown back in the wicker arbor-sofa, and his eyes looking vaguely out into the air, the story was told this afternoon without a word.

One has often seen the red wick of the extinguished taper flare into a temporary glow—waver—and then go out forever. So was it with this love in the heart of Moritz Reisse. During the years between the separation from Nadine von Lillienberg and his meeting with her as the Countess von Gravenhorst, his passion had, however unconsciously, been changed into a sentimental *tendresse.*

Had he never met her again, this phase of it might either have lasted until the end of his life or died out altogether, forgotten in some new experience. But fate brought him once again to her side. The magnetism of her own feeling rekindled his into life. The flame burned awhile and then flickered out—this time utterly.

There are few variations to such an old story. How weary he grew during those months! Weary of the endless demands his position at her side entailed upon him; weary of the look from her eyes, the cadence of her voice, the poise of her figure—weary of her love and of her whole self. Burdensome had become just such hours as this, when, seated alone with Nadine, he read aloud one or another of the round of poets whose amorous verse was her delight. More unendurable were the art arguments, empty discussions in which the speculative side of her character found particular amusement. "On commence par être dupe; on finit par être fripon," the proverb runs. Reisse was not wholly free from a guilty sense of his thorough knavery; but irritation at having been the dupe of sentiment and cajolery was vastly keener.

He had indeed remained all the summer. Alexis was thoroughly delighted at his continued stay. In the multitude of the husband's pursuits and cares the wife and friend were much together—according to Alexis' special intents in inviting Moritz. "The best of good company for one another," Alexis said frequently. Besides all that his hand found to do at Gravenhorst, Alexis had that summer bought a valuable piece of property in B——, the house of the ex-mayor, Johannes Märner. In place of renting the dwelling to other occupants, he abruptly decided on fitting it up for a town-residence, where he and Nadine could spend a part of each winter, in place of passing the entire

season in Berlin. These alterations engrossed Alexis completely.

To quit Gravenhorst on a sufficient pretext was the one thing Moritz now wished. But how to break his fetters? Weak, irresolute, he shrank from her anger. It was true that, in a few weeks from now, engagements to Manager X—— would oblige him to leave Gravenhorst for Berlin. But Nadine had induced Alexis to fix their own departure to Berlin for the same date. "We can spend April and May in the house in B——, instead of October and November," she suggested. A net was cast about Moritz the strength and breadth of which he had only lately come to realize—in anger and ennui. To-day his predicament seemed to him particularly intolerable. He would risk a battle.

Chance gave him courage and excuse. Shortly after breakfast a note sent post-haste from His Highness the Duke had come to him.

It contained a request for his immediate presence in B——, to remain for the following three weeks to rehearse and superintend a concert in the new Singschule, for a public charity. He had here an opportunity, the chance of a respite, and before it should end he could develop some plan for a completer separation. He read the Duke's cordial letter aloud at the table, with feigned annoyance. Alexis expressed his vexation. Nadine said nothing. Moritz took care that she should recognize the letter as genuine. She handed it back to him with a smile.

There was nothing in the situation that she did not realize. She had perceived its growth from week to week. But not a word escaped her lips. Her policy of love ran counter to that. Sometimes she found it hard to maintain it, and stopped on the verge of discovering to Moritz what she understood so thoroughly. But she held her peace.

In any case she hardly would express her own feelings when the time came for her to accuse his.

To-day she affected to be painting rapidly in order to finish part of the picture in front of her before it was time to go down to the Lodge. But she was not giving undivided attention to her brush. As Moritz sat partly turned from her, she glanced occasionally at him—then swiftly continued her work. The bitter suggestion conveyed by his whole personality lately had become normal to it.

All at once she broke the silence abruptly, as if divining his thoughts.

"The Duke's letter is sufficient excuse! You may go," she said, without taking her eyes from her canvas.

Moritz started violently. The book fell from his hand. "May go? The Duke's letter a sufficient excuse?" he repeated, in confusion.

She laughed dryly. "Certainly," she replied, dipping her pencil in the color. "Prisoner and jailer—you have set us down for that, at present. Pray, no denials. I do not blame you. You are a man. Constancy is too much to expect from you. You are tired of all this." She made a sweeping gesture. "You would have been glad to be free from it long ago. Strange! but you have feared a scene and its possible consequences. You have been wrong."

"Do not utter follies that are unkind follies," he exclaimed, rising and crossing to the opposite side of the kiosk. "Nadine! you cannot think what you say. I tired of our life here? I—a prisoner at Gravenhorst, fearful of a misunderstanding with you? I do not think you can realize what those words imply."

"I realize it perfectly," she returned, laying down her brush and taking up her fan. "For weeks—already—a change has come upon you. My eye is the eye of a woman who loves

you. Nothing deceives it. Life here at Gravenhorst with me galls you and wearies you. My friend, your bondage here, or to me anywhere else, is imaginary. Moritz, for what do you take me? How ill you understand me or all my sex! Will anything, I wonder, enlarge your ideas? At all events, I say to you now, go—you are free. I want no bondsman beside me."

He was less ill-at-ease as he answered: "I do not know what you mean by bondage. It is impossible that you should imagine that I have ceased to—to care for you! Can you possibly suppose me so devoid of all gratitude that I can forget what you have lavished upon me, given up to me—"

She interrupted him. "I have said nothing about your forgetting: and gratitude has no share in your situation. Besides, what woman like me could be content with a love developed from obligation, a love emasculated into—gratitude? Moritz, you cannot help your own heart. The hour in which your love reached its height and encountered mine was the beginning of its ebb. Mine stays ever at its climax. Listen to me. Indeed, nothing that you can say will alter my belief. I have determined on a dangerous—no," she interrupted herself, smiling, "I will not call it a dangerous, but a frank experiment. Return to B——. Take up your old life and work there. Resume every friendship that you turned from to come to us at Gravenhorst. I trust you, assured that no other woman has supplanted me in your heart. I am bold—I believe none can! Ah, be it any other, known or to be met while we are separated thus for a time, compare such with the woman whom you have loved all your life. This is only a cloud that has come over your heart. When the Duke's concert is done and you return to Gravenhorst for a week or so before we three set

out for Berlin, you will tell me how well I have read your malady, and how cleverly prescribed a remedy."

Could it be that he did not see how, with every word, Nadine was one who

> "Tells the bright water slipping through her fingers
> That she permits its flow"?

"I do not know what to say to you," Moritz replied, slowly. "You are wrong. You are perversely wrong. Every sentence wounds me. You misjudge, you wilfully accuse me."

"—Of nothing," she returned lightly. "Look at me. Do you refuse to go? Do you refuse?"

He flushed again. "I—I have said that I must go, in consequence of his Highness's commands. But only because they are on me. In my whole heart there is no shadow of what you lay to my charge so suddenly. Heaven is my witness, Nadine!"

"Et cetera," she said, with the same not ill-natured, expressive smile. "No more protestations! I have said enough for you to discover that I have my own perceptions, and am more reasonable than you supposed. You will not admit that? Very well—gallantry shall carry the day. Let us say no more. You will leave here to-morrow. I shall miss you, I shall be glad to welcome you again. *Voilà tout.* And I give you my hand in token of perfect amity and good-fellowship."

He took it mechanically. Once before in this same place he had taken it—in another such covenant. Something not unlike contrition came into his face—careless confirmation of Nadine's words. "You—you are very good," he said; "but you will tell me soon that you have been mistaken."

"My dear Moritz, I am neither very good nor at all mistaken," she answered, laughing.

At the same moment Alexis' whistle was heard. He came up the path, waving his hand, and stepped lightly into the kiosk.

"Well, my children," he exclaimed, "what have you found to talk about this hot afternoon? Nadine, Lorenz came back on the early train from B——. They have matched perfectly the upholstering in the library. But the green damask is not to be found, for love or money. What had we better do? I shall let you decide. I declare, Reisse, I shall have to fit up and give you a house, the day you are married! Only I should have to be a prince out of the Arabian Nights to induce you to take the gift."

"You may believe that," replied Moritz, laughing. "My marriage is, in any case, an uncertain contingency. You needn't begin laying foundations. And am I not also a true son of Bohemia, Alexis, whose hearth-stone is never in one place, and who is too fond of wandering about under the sky and stars to appreciate house and wife, or any such domestic fixtures?"

"Your friends, then, may take it as all the higher compliment that you appreciate theirs," Alexis answered, gayly, and hummed a bar of Verdi's "Sempre Libera." "Rest secure in your nomadism. No one, with my consent, shall try to confine your roving feet until they are weary."

Nadine had been busy putting together brushes and colors. The three quitted the kiosk. With a good deal of lively badinage they descended the path to the garden. Not even a last rose was visible. As they entered the hall of the Lodge, Alexis turned to Moritz.

"Well, my dear Reisse, married you may never be, but

jolly as a bridegroom you certainly seem this afternoon. You have been a trifle saturnine lately, do you know it? I began to think that your 'Paris and Helen' had been too much for your intellect or your temper. This afternoon, now, you act like a man who has had some disagreeable weight taken off his mind, or a surgical operation performed, or some weighty confession made."

"He has," interposed Nadine, dryly. "And he has been confessing himself to me."

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed Alexis; "then to his spiritual benefit, I am sure."

"Well," she answered, smiling, "he has been given what sometimes is better than any priest's absolution—a woman's advice. Oh, no—I shall not betray a penitent's secrets. It is quite —— Reisse's and my own affair. I intend to keep it so, I promise you."

Alexis laughed in turn, and after a few words more they separated. Some visitors arrived at the Lodge after dinner. The evening was occupied with their entertainment.

It was true. He felt himself free. She had said so. Moritz left Gravenhorst Lodge next morning. He drove away, resolved never again to enter its gates. Nadine bade him farewell, in apparently the most buoyantly cheerful and kindly mood. The Park lay all green and gold, as he was whirled down through it. The swans trumpeted and ruffled about in the water; the air was full of the scent of pine and hemlock. All seemed fair and reposeful in the September atmosphere. But Moritz gave a sigh of relief as the carriage passed out between the tall stone pillars, in whose vases only a single red dash of the geranium blossoms could be seen. It was like Tannhäuser leaving behind him the Venusberg and its sovereign. He was free!

On he went. The high road stretched before. The moun-

tains rose up behind. He was free! Yes, his face was set toward unfettered life once more. His heart throbbed at the thought of returning to it, of again throwing himself into that wider, more bustling life of the creative artist, of meeting new men and women. "I need a thorough toning-up!" he said to himself. "'Paris and Helen' has been a good bit of work—but the summer, otherwise— Good Lord, what an ass I was to come here! Ah, and there is Fräulein Ehlert, too!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"Oh, what may man within him hide!"
Measure for Measure.

When Elsa Ehlert saw Moritz cross her threshold again, much of what she felt she was able, fortunately, to hide under the greeting due to any absent friend. She had passed the summer in or about B——, employed with her studies and her friends. Indirectly she had heard from time to time of Moritz, who had so suddenly entered her life and slipped out from it. Nothing significant was said before parting as to any letter-writing, and there had been occasion for none. But, as weeks passed, the stronger grew an emotion, at first a mystery, then an enemy vainly contested and more dominant till its work was completed. Moritz stood between her and all other men. The shock was severe, when she admitted to herself that this was true. For she was not free, even to the pain of a foolish passion.

Unhappy Johann Steins! What should she do? Break with him or cleave to him?—persevere in the pretence of loving, or sacrifice pledge to impulse? Alas! were she thus to free herself, on what could she base hope? She understood the influence which drew Moritz to her. It was all worse than nothing, so far as concerned this new phase.

Such had been the struggle in her heart since her return to B—— from Wasserthal. Fortunately she possessed no small self-control, or Johann Steins in particular might

have suspected that all was not well for him. She kept vigilant watch over every word and look.

In the Duke's projected concert in the Singschule she was to take some share. She knew that Moritz might arrive in town at any hour. But she had trouble to be quite her wonted self, as he seated himself this evening near her father, and, after a few moments, they were left to continue their conversation alone. "At last! he is here again!" Elsa's heart kept crying out with a throbbing joyfulness. His voice, the glance from his eyes, the pleasure with which he sat there listening to her—unspeakably happy even these things made her.

"And so you are glad to see me again?" Moritz repeated, innocently. He himself had been unfeignedly glad, but his pleasure was side by side with the irritation against himself that nevertheless brought now no practical impulse towards another plane of moral and intellectual action. Surely he was only resuming a part to be played under these conditions! There were other parts. It was all a matter of environment. "On your honor, as Rödel's incarnation of truthfulness, are you so very glad to see me back and at work again?" he asked, in a half-bantering tone.

"Very glad," she answered, smiling. How hard had it been for her to hide the degree of her gladness! "And as to work, when have you rested, I wonder? Have you really finished this new opera, in which I am to conquer Berlin, if I keep my engagement with the Intendant?"

He had brought part of the manuscript with him, he replied. They could look over it later.

"I do not think you seem thoroughly well, after all this hard work?" she said, more than once.

Her quick perception discovered the change in the man-

ner of the man, the look in his eyes, a certain reluctance to speak of himself. But her pure heart little suspected the cause.

"I am thoroughly well," he reiterated, hastily; "ready, too, for Berlin and November."

With a new happiness she was reminded that they were to be there together.

They went over the music he had brought with him. Nothing could have suited Elsa better. Moritz remarked how this quiet summer of rest and study had doubled the beauty of her voice, and she exclaimed, again and again, that this music was the music Moritz had been destined to write from the beginning of the world. Laughing, she recalled to him their first meeting, the night when he had overheard her criticism of the "Prinz Max" outside the Hoftheater door. No such fault could be found in these pages, she said. And she was right.

"Now let me see, my friend," she said, reflectingly. "You are to be in town until this concert is done with, I believe? After that, where do you go? Do you return to your friends, or remain here until it is time to go to Berlin?"

"I remain here—No, I return to Gravenhorst," answered Moritz, in some confusion. "Truth to tell, I hardly know yet which I shall do. I have promised von Gravenhorst to go back to the Lodge for at least a few days; but they had nearly decided to come down during the concert week to the new house here. If so, he and the Countess will stay through October. We are all expecting to go on to Berlin together."

"The von Gravenhorsts, also?" repeated Elsa. She wondered whether they would engross his spare time in Berlin. She had not looked forward to it. "I forgot they

spend their winters there. Are they fond of Berlin society? I like your friend's face. He has an honest and sincere one. Is his wife as beautiful as she is reported? I might have noticed her on that first night of 'Prinz Max,' but I had too much else to think of."

"The Countess is a very beautiful woman," he replied, "but a somewhat peculiar one. I do not think you would feel any special sympathy with her—as you do for your friend Baroness Brandt, for example."

"The Baroness has indeed been very kind to me," Elsa responded, "and a whole handbook of etiquette besides. I love her dearly."

They chatted a few minutes longer; then he bade her good-night. As he walked down the street and entered his old lodgings, rest filled his heart! Once, once again had he been permitted to enter a green valley of peace. No, it was rather like breathing the clear atmosphere of a mountain-top after a fen's vapors. He felt himself in a mood to inhale it. After all, a man's lapses from self-control and honor were blunders—one lost by them! Evil had been the day wherein he had quitted this purer world! Was it not all hallucination, to vanish suddenly and give place to the lustful seclusion of the cavern of Holda? or had that been only a fantasy which he could forget?

For the next two weeks it indeed appeared as if his summer's absence from B—— had been the unreality. All seemed as of old. Preparations for the concert absorbed him. He had his chorus and orchestra to rehearse, and to write some new music. One by one his evenings were spent in the company of Elsa Ehlert and her father. They were, as Elsa predicted, seldom alone on these occasions. Johann Steins came and went. He appeared to include Herr Reisse in his pledge to Elsa as to her profession and

professional intimacies. He seldom referred to him, but was perhaps growing a trifle more observant. Besides Johann, often came sociable Rödel and his wife, Bertha Grauschimmel, and many music-loving people, aristocratic and other, who rejoiced in having the entrée to a young prima-donna's circle. Nevertheless Moritz was a member of it. She enjoyed that dangerous pleasure from day to day. The pleasure had its compensation each night, when, thinking of Johann Steins and reproaching herself for a part she played, more difficult than any operatic rôle, she asked herself how this would end. What must she do to quiet this unreasoning passion, daily growing dearer to her soul? And in any case how break her engagement with the advocate? Could she tell her betrothed the truth and beg a release?—implore him to keep her secret? Harder still was what she told herself—that it might be ordained to her otherwise to keep this secret forever. Where should she hide her face if Moritz Reisse discovered how she now regarded him, before he himself had—what? Learned to love her? And this he might never do; certainly did not do to-day! Poor Elsa!

But to Reisse those were happy weeks, taking all things together. Moritz felt himself living a new life while they lasted. He heard twice from Alexis, and saw his late host as many times, when the last touches to the house in town brought Alexis to B——. From Nadine herself came only some conventional remembrances by her husband, now and then. It unmistakably was part of her original scheme to have no needless communication with Moritz during their separation. She had hinted as much. Moritz began to ask himself whether breaking with her were a thing to be so dreaded in the doing after all. In amicably furthering their present separation, had Nadine not shown how much

she was at his mercy?—had she not made a concession out of a necessity? It was a pity Moritz did not speculate a little more attentively on this point.

But with the week preceding the concert Moritz had a new subject to meditate upon. For he began to remark certain unexpected phenomena in the conduct of Johann Steins. The taciturn young advocate suddenly became quicker of speech, watchful of Elsa in the society of others, and finally began to manifest some evidences of a personal and particular antipathy to Moritz Reisse. "I declare," said Moritz to Elsa, one evening, after a blundering and rather embarrassing exhibition of this, "if I did not think something of Herr Steins' good sense, I should accuse him of being jealous!" Elsa blushed. She murmured some deprecating reply. Secretly she was sorely troubled. Nevertheless, Johann did not vent any displeasure in private. He seldom met his betrothed entirely alone. When he did, he certainly did not summon courage to quarrel; and that Elsa herself shrank from the idea of any such *éclaircissement* may be supposed. But gladly would she have had the battle over with, if a battle must be. She could not strike the fire from the flint herself. Moritz Reisse, after two or three allusions to the rapid metamorphosis in Johann's manner toward him, said no more, perceiving that it annoyed her. Then, as days went on and he sharpened his eyesight, he refrained all the more carefully. He became sure that he himself was inherently a part of the difficulty. Precisely in what degree connected, of course escaped him. Friendship in this matter is usually far more blind than love.

One day, the third preceding the Duke's concert, Moritz was returning from the Residenz, where he had just been favored with a long interview with his critical Highness.

He chanced to pass through Münsterstrasse, where Count Alexis' new mansion was situated. A carriage was waiting in front. The Count himself appeared in the portico.

"Ha, Reisse, is that you?" cried he. "I put my head twice into your quarters this afternoon and found you out. Come here. Let me show you how things begin to look." Moritz ran up the steps. Alexis proceeded to escort him all over the hotel, beautifully furnished, and even through the conservatory and tiny garden.

"Nadine? Oh, Nadine is quite well," replied Alexis, in answer to Moritz' cold question, as they returned to the library and sat down for a few minutes beside a window. "She sent her regards to you—something of that sort. You are missed by both of us! Indeed, we have nearly decided, as I wrote you, to come down during the concert week, to remain here until the end of October. Of course you will come as soon as we arrive. I think our so doing is settled, and you promised, you know."

"Yes, yes, you are very kind," Moritz answered, in secret vexation. It was not advisable to object to these arrangements at present. "You say you are both coming for the concert in any case; if so, when do you come?"

"Let me see," said Alexis reflectively, "to-day is Monday, your concert is Thursday. Well, we shall be here before dinner-time on Wednesday evening."

Alexis got up and straightened an engraving hung awry.

"And you will probably remain here for some weeks?" Moritz asked, meditatively.

"Probably—and you with us. We can run up to the Lodge occasionally; but I think you and she and I will find this our pleasantest headquarters for awhile. After that, hurrah for Berlin and the production of your 'Paris and Helen,' that you have done me the honor to compose

beneath my ancestral roof! Apropos of roofs—isn't it ridiculous that Nadine should only have been down once to see how the second salon is furnished—after all her anxiety?"

"Only once!" asked Moritz. "When, pray, was that? How in the world could either of you run down here without my knowing of it? When was she in town?"

"It was one day last week. You went with His Highness' party to the Lustschloss, I heard, and I haven't seen you since. Nadine and I came and returned by the train. This warm weather has made her disposed to keep quiet; and, besides, she wishes the second floor to be something of a surprise to her. She has confidence in my taste, she says, and always makes minor changes at leisure."

Moritz said no more. So Nadine had been in B——! probably in the expectation of seeing him, possibly for other reasons appertaining to him! He thought at once of his renewed intimacy with Elsa Elhert. Had something of this reached her ears and excited suspicions that old influences were drawing him farther away from her? True to his nature, with a sudden cowardice he dreaded her jealousy. He remembered her remark that last afternoon, "I trust you—not because I must, but because I do, and am well assured that no woman has supplanted me in your heart." Only friendship for Elsa it was. How might she not misconstrue this friendship? Nevertheless, had she not herself said to him, "Resume your former life, your old associations, and learn to compare with other women the woman you have loved?" Thereupon he remembered again how carefully he had avoided betraying the extent of his most important association during his spring weeks in B——.

As if echoing his troublesome thoughts, Alexis turned

as they left the house, and said, laughing, "By-the-way, you sly fellow, do you know that there is abundance of gossip about the town concerning you? Yes, you—and charming Fräulein Ehlert. Oh, I don't mean anything out of the way—not at all. Only good folk say that you and she are indulging in an artistic friendship. I presume that is the proper term for it, since Fräulein Ehlert is said to be betrothed. Go to the Club, Ludwig; I am going to walk down with Herr Reisse."

They proceeded on their way. "Fräulein Ehlert is, indeed, a friend," exclaimed Moritz, sharply, a good deal irritated; "so much so that I shall be thoroughly sorry to hear any stupidities circulated. She is, as you say, betrothed, and to a fine fellow. Your friends, the Brandts, can satisfy you or anyone else as to the folly of gossip such as you hint at."

"There, there, my dear man!" replied Alexis, much amused, as they reached the corner of the street; "don't take the trouble to defend so warmly what I make no doubt is a perfectly dispassionate state of affairs! I don't care for the chatter of the town! I don't want the Brandts' explanations! Give me a chance some fine day to meet Fräulein Elsa again if you choose—that I, too, may bow down and worship, along with the rest. I have had a good laugh already though, with Nadine, over the sly way in which you kept still all summer about your having been such a friend to this fascinating Fräulein before you came to us. Oh, you needn't look so deceitful. We'll forgive you, though Nadine told me to say to you that she should be jealous of any such platonic sirens, new or old."

The two men parted. Alexis turned into his Club and then took the last train for Gravenhorst. Moritz went home thoroughly disturbed and angry. His deception

had found him out. Just at this juncture, when everything depended on his limited powers of diplomacy, what trouble might not arise from its discovery!

He himself discovered something else that evening. He took to unpacking a portmanteau, left undisturbed until now. The small olive-wood box previously mentioned seemed to have suffered damage. One polished corner was chipped. It looked as if some person, hurriedly opening it perhaps, had dropped it to the floor. He recollected that he himself had thus let it fall previous to quitting Gravenhorst. He put the box up again, frowning as he bethought himself of the correspondence in it. He wished he might never rest his eye on it again. "I will burn those letters of hers," he muttered, "the very next evening I am alone! *Die schönen Tage in Aranjues—Sind nun zu Ende.*"

Yes, quite at an end. But even if he might not have forgotten his resolution, as he often forgot other important ones, one thing is certain—Moritz Reisse did not burn those letters.

CHAPTER XV.

"I have trusted thee, Camillo,
With all the nearest things to my heart."
Winter's Tale.

THE Duke himself appointed the last *Probe* for the charity concert, to take place on Wednesday evening; and signified his gracious intention of being present. Reisse set out for the Singschule at an early hour.

He had heard that the Count and Countess von Gravenhorst were come to town—had probably arrived at least an hour or so earlier. He need not go to her house to-night!—would not, at any rate, he said angrily to himself. He set off for the Singschule at a great pace. Suddenly he recollected that a letter from the good X——, of Berlin, was due. He turned into the post-office.

Yes, there was a letter for him, but not from Manager X——. Moritz suppressed something not unlike an oath as he recognized Nadine's distinct handwriting. The note was dated the preceding morning.

"I arrive with Alexis on Wednesday evening. This note will hardly reach you sooner. I break a sort of promise (to myself at least) as to writing you, that I may give you fair warning to invent any plausible statements your lively fancy prompts, to meet me again quite as outwardly free from any *platonics* [the word was underscored] with others as I have believed you. Don't be alarmed, Moritz. A woman who loves as I do is easily placated. I congratulate you on your successful reserve as to a certain topic, while our guest here—no more of that, though. Only remem-

ber what I said when you departed—that I would trust you. I may repent saying more. Temptation gets the better of me. Listen. You *ought* to suppose that if by any accident or design any other woman comes between us it will be the worst of days for us all. Watch, then, your heart, my friend. Please be ready to return to Münsterstrasse with Alexis and myself, when the concert is over. Alexis tells me he has invited you. Adieu.

"N.

"P. S.—We stay some weeks."

The curse escaped Moritz's lips this time. Resisting his first impulse to tear this precious communication up, he slipped it into his pocket-book. He recognized the influence of some sudden suspicion and of jealous anger. His self-control had been worsted. "So help me, Heaven, I will make no peace with her, whatever she may do or say!" he exclaimed; "I am tired of servitude." Thereupon he remembered how little, after all, he was in her power—that he, not she, was master of the situation.

He turned the corner of the street. An athletic figure coming the other way nearly ran into him.

"Why, Reisse!" exclaimed Alexis, shaking hands, "are you on your way to the Singschule? I'm glad I met you. I'm going there. Just wait till I step into the telegraph-office and answer a dispatch."

Moritz complied. "Come, come, what are you about, away from your wife and your new house this evening?" he inquired, as Alexis reappeared and they walked on together. "You ought to be doing the honors at home, instead of running around to concert rehearsals, with your Bohemian acquaintances!"

Alexis laughed. "The new house is swept and gar-

nished. But no wife is yet there, nor will be until to-morrow evening, after your concert. Am I not free to amuse myself in Bohemia, with a clear conscience?"

"Until to-morrow night," said Moritz, in surprise. "And then so late? Why are you not settled in town? And did not the Countess accompany you?"

"No. Husbands propose, and friends—are indisposed," returned Alexis. "We were within a half-hour of starting together from Gravenhorst. Everything was ready, and our trunks dispatched, when up comes a message to Nadine from her invalid friend, Counsellor Otto's wife. She has one of her ill turns. Nothing would do but Nadine must come and spend the night there; so off she went. The Waldemars, who live close by there, drive down to-morrow evening to this concert. Nadine will remain to-morrow with Frau Otto, and come here in the evening with the Waldemars. I shall meet her at the concert, and then I will take her and you to Münsterstrasse, for a glass of champagne. Your room is ready."

"Thank you," replied Moritz. "I see. You are very kind."

The subject was dropped. Presently Alexis said, "Can you keep a secret, Reisse? If you can, I've three parts of a mind to tell you one."

"I will try," Moritz answered. He spoke, thinking of another secret, represented by the letter in his pocket, which he had so long kept, and hoped to keep forever from the man at his side.

"I rather believe I should betray it to you, even if you wouldn't try," Alexis said, soberly. "I'm awfully disquieted, my dear fellow. A telegram came from Berlin, when I arrived in Münsterstrasse, from my financial agent. The old North-German — the great Trust-Company, you

know, with which our bank here is connected—is in a very unexpected and critical situation. The failure of that London house, last week, has proved a bad business. Now if anything should happen just now to the North-German, I declare I don't know what might not become of our concern here! Nothing of the sort could occur at a worse time. I am nervous. I admit it. I can hardly hold myself together. The rest of our Directors, though, are as cool as fishes about it."

"I'm sorry you feel so," returned Moritz. "But perhaps the others are right in keeping cool. Matters may not run at all awry. To be sure, no one has so much at stake, and consequently so much to lose, as yourself."

"Exactly. It is best not to worry until something definite occurs. I shall have another word early to-morrow. I am more concerned for Nadine's sake than my own."

They entered the hall of the Singschule. "You are late, Herr Musikdirektor," said the Cerberus, Riemann, as they hurried past him.

Late they undoubtedly were, as Moritz perceived when they went into the auditorium and beheld the chorus, rising rank above rank on the stage, the orchestra in readiness, and Elsa Ehlert, as well as Fräulein Topp, Herr Silbersteim, and all the other soloists in their chairs, talking briskly together. Moritz began the rehearsal at once. Alexis made his way to the ducal box, where his Highness and party received him cordially. Among the group chanced to be a no less distinguished guest than the Duke's cousin, old Marshal Calenberg (better known since his death by his famous posthumous work, "The Military Equilibrium of Europe"), who was then visiting the Residenz for a day or so. He had been a friend of the elder Von Gravenhorst, and was sincerely glad to see Alexis.

The rehearsal ended rather earlier than usual, and Elsa awaited the coming of her escort. Johann had had some legal errand on hand and, after seeing his fiancée safely to the stage, he had slipped off, promising to return before the rehearsal should end. Something delayed him. The crowd of singers and orchestra people all filtered away, and, Johann not making his appearance, Elsa finally accepted Reisse's arm. She bade Her Rödel and his wife good-night, and left the building, quite among the last.

Some moments later, Count Alexis, also detained, hurried out into the entrance-hall. "I say, Herr Rödel," he exclaimed, spying the manager, "have you seer Herr Reisse go out? Or is he in the music-library, downstairs?"

"Herr Reisse left us about five minutes ago," responded Rödel. "He passed out with Fräulein Ehlert on his arm. He cannot have gone far."

Alexis uttered a surprised ejaculation. "The sly fellow! To slip out of such an excellent opportunity for me to meet again his shy nightingale! And I wanted him to come to Münsterstrasse for the night! But no matter—too late now! I'll go to his lodgings, perhaps."

Alexis walked down the hall. Old Riemann stopped him.

"Will the Herr Count see Herr Reisse this evening?" inquired the doorkeeper, respectfully.

"Possibly not this evening, but certainly early to-morrow, Riemann," replied Alexis, pausing. "Is there anything special—any message?"

Riemann produced carefully a red leather card-case, evidently containing letters and papers. "The Herr Musikdirektor must have dropped this here a few moments ago. It has his name on the cover. It caught my eye, lying yonder. He came out almost the last, with Fräulein Ehlert."

"You would like me to give it to him, I suppose," said

Alexis, good-naturedly. He took the article into his possession. "But stay—will to-morrow do in case I cannot find Herr Reisse at his lodgings this evening?"

"Certainly," returned Riemann; "I don't like to keep it myself, lest something should be missed and I be blamed; and I shall not be here to-morrow myself. Please be good enough, sir, to tell the Herr Direktor that the pocket-book has not been meddled with since he dropped it. I am a thousand times obliged to the Herr Count!"

Alexis slipped his friend's lost piece of property into his breast pocket and turned out into the bright moonlight of the street.

"No use going to look for Reisse for an hour," said he, to himself. "I'll stroll over to Münsterstrasse and see if there are any telegrams."

As Alexis reached the next corner, a gentleman sauntering leisurely along the almost deserted pavement saluted him.

"Ah, Marshal," Alexis returned, recognizing broad-shouldered old Calenberg, "how comes it that you have forsaken his Highness? Whither bound, alone by yourself?"

"I learned of an old friend's presence at the New Army Club," the Marshal replied, continuing his progress at Count Alexis' side. "Are you going up the street too? I shall be glad of your company."

The two gentlemen lighted their cigars. They walked slowly on in the brilliant moonlight, talking together. It was another *démarche* of Alexis' destiny. What occurred in consequence of this chance meeting, and the ensuing conversation during their half-mile stroll along the silent boulevard can be recounted later.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Say that some lady, as perhaps there is,
Hath for your love as great a pang of heart.
.....You can not love her;
You tell her so; must she not then be answered?"
Twelfth Night.

In the meantime, Moritz Riesse and Elsa Ehlert went toward the young singer's home. The evening being so perfect a one, our friends were laggards, rather unconsciously. Nevertheless, as the porter opened the door, Elsa turned to Moritz.

"It is not so very late," she said; "father will be very glad to see you—and I should like to show you my answer to Intendant X—— on that matter I was speaking of. Come in for a few moments."

The feeling that this was, in some sort, their last night of liberty, for some time at least, prompted both request and its acceptance. Moritz followed her upstairs to the tiny drawing-room. Ruprecht Ehlert sat there alone. His days of regard for such romantic matters as moonlight were long since over, and, violin in hand, the old man was playing softly to himself. He rubbed his eyes, welcomed Moritz heartily, and asked many questions about the rehearsal. Elsa went into the next room to make some changes in the letter to the Intendant. She completed them, and then came out and sat down by her father's side, listening, rather absently, to his music.

Presently both Moritz and she remarked how very warm the night had grown. The breeze had indeed

died. The sultry air was like midsummer come back again. Elsa unfastened the shutters opening upon a long balcony overhanging the garden back of the tall old house. Thereupon the sound of laughter and the jingling of another piano came up loudly from below. Young people were spending the evening with the lodgers of the second story. After dancing and frolicking until out of breath, probably, they had betaken themselves to walking upon their own balcony immediately underneath Elsa's, or to sitting in the open windows. Magnified shadows and flarings of candle-light alternately rested on the low trees and shrubs of the garden. Moritz and Elsa stepped out, partly in curiosity, partly for coolness.

As they stood there with the shutters closed behind them, listening and smiling at the sport going on beneath, so distinctly audible in the still night, there came a sudden lull. Somebody was being urged to make some more music, "Sing it." "Yes, yes! Pray do sing it!" cried several voices entreatingly. Not overmuch pressing proved necessary. A few chords on the piano came next; and then as Elsa leaned over the balcony with Moritz, a rich and passionate contralto ascended. The melody was a sombre, minor one; the words of the song were these;

"I tell my heart I do not love him. Why
Is it that, in his absence, all the room
Seems void and empty, my blithe spirits die—
I look upon the mirth with wearied eye,
And the gay music sounds like laughter in a tomb?

"I tell my heart that there are other men
As much and more to it. Why then do none
Stir these new thoughts within me? make me think
Of life and love as I have never done?
Why can no other man do this, save him alone?

"Oh heart, much more I tell thee! Yet I hear
A voice, gainsaying all, within thee cry,
'Why longer mock thyself? Hast thou then fear
To own the truth? Ah, thou dost hold him dear!
So dear that thou must win his love or—die.'"

The last chord of the accompaniment ceased. A patter of hands and a murmur of compliments mounted. Elsa Ehlert started as one awakened from a dream. She raised herself slowly from the railing, turning her face from Moritz.

"What a strange air! and stranger, odder words!" exclaimed the young composer, softly. "More in fact like a sonnet than a song, wasn't it? I don't know the author. Do you? Why, you are cold, you shiver!" he cried, noticing her silence and agitation. "Are you ill?"

Elsa shook her head in silence. Her face, in the dim light from the closed blinds, looked wan. Tears, even, seemed to be glistening in her eyes.

"For heaven's sake what has distressed you?" inquired Moritz, in alarm.

Elsa turned from him toward the casement through which they had come out.

"Nothing—nothing," she responded, almost irritably, getting the better of her sudden weakness. "Excitement—the fatigue of the rehearsal—folly! The melody of that song was so wretchedly sad. Pray think no more about it—ever!"

Moritz made no further response, remembering her remarkable, if very explicable, susceptibility to music. But at the same time he asked himself whether it could be possible that Elsa Ehlert's secret heart-trouble was so profound as to be suddenly quickened by a curious song to a degree that she could not try to disguise from him.

Confused and abstracted, he followed her mutely into the apartment. Ruprecht had slipped away to bed. Moritz glanced at his watch and caught up his cloak and hat.

"I am ashamed of myself," he exclaimed. "After all your hard work, too! I had no idea it was after eleven. Good-night, my friend."

"Good-night," Elsa replied, holding out her hand and speaking with a tremulous seriousness in her voice. "With the von Gravenhorsts' arrival, I suppose I shall see less of you—after to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid our holiday—shall I call it that?—is over," he answered, making light of her tone. "Never mind, though. We have many more to come. *Auf Wiedersehen;* and be fresh for to-morrow night!"

He turned. "Oh, wait!" exclaimed Elsa; "you forget my Berlin letter!" She took it from the table. "Really! It is neither addressed nor sealed," she added, smiling at her carelessness. "I shall be only a single minute."

She entered the next room, leaving Moritz alone. But just as she closed the intervening door, a quick step suddenly mounted the oak stairs leading to her apartment. The hall door was not shut, and a quick knock fairly pushed it open, authoritatively. Moritz looked up surprised. Johann Steins, rather out of breath, crossed the threshold and stopped short inside the drawing-room. A frown darkened his face at the sight of Moritz Reisse seated there unconcernedly at so late an hour of the evening. Moritz felt the conviction that the present rencontre was likely to be, for various reasons, an unexpectedly awkward one.

"Is Fräulein Ehlert safe home?" asked Johann, brusquely, hardly greeting our composer by so much as a nod.

"Good evening, Herr Steins," said Moritz, with ill-timed

deliberation. "Yes, Fräulein Ehlert is at home, and in her room, yonder, addressing a letter. She has been extremely anxious about you, Herr Steins—really concerned, in consequence of your failure to meet her at the close of the rehearsal. But she was kind enough to accept of my escort, in your default, and since her return," he added, with the same evil spirit of mischief prompting him, "both she and I have speculated anxiously over your mysterious absence, with increasing solicitude—each hour." Moritz himself had not been in Elsa's drawing-room quite an hour.

Johann Steins' pale countenance flushed, under the suspicion that he overtly was made game of, and by a man whom he had come during the past three weeks to look upon as, in an exasperating if rather indefinable way, his rival and supplanter.

"I was detained necessarily, Herr Reisse," he replied, looking straight into Moritz's with an unwonted sparkle in his eyes. "I am indebted to you for acting as my fiancée's escort. But—but let me tell you plainly, Herr Reisse, that the tone you use, and your presence in her house at this hour, are most offensive to me."

"I am sorry for it, my dear sir," responded Moritz, contemptuously, amused at this direct outbreak from the mild-mannered young advocate, "extremely sorry. But—as I did not come here to see *you* or to talk to you, perhaps you will have the goodness, even at this hour of which you so disapprove, to leave me to bid Fräulein Ehlert good-evening alone? Or at least without further disagreeable interruption."

It was unfortunate that Elsa herself did not hear the two voices, rising into warmth, as she sat at her desk in the bedroom. But the heavy door of the old house was

tightly closed. The lively party downstairs had again become hilarious in a noisy galop.

"I will not leave!" retorted Steins, fairly angry. "And, by heaven! when you do go out of that door to-night it shall be for the last time or *I* will never set *my* foot across it again! This question has got to be settled and ended, here and now! I am tired of it!"

"What do you mean, Herr Steins, by such an impertinent and silly speech?" exclaimed Moritz, catching fire in his turn at this open display of ill-temper and jealousy. "What business is it of yours how many times a week, a day, an hour I cross this threshold? Have you actually the audacity to suppose that you can control my movements? Do you fancy you can forbid a single guest Fräulein Ehlert's house? 'Settled and ended here'"—Moritz repeated, mockingly, taking a step forward; "what in the name of sanity are you talking about, Herr Johann Steins, Advokat?"

Steins raised his stalwart arm with an angry gesture. Before he could answer further than that, the door opened. Elsa's ear had, all at once, caught the hot words. She gave a gasp of surprise and apprehension at the sight of her lover and Moritz facing each other thus, in hostile wise.

"Johann—you here!" she exclaimed. "And—and you are angry? What does it mean?"

Johann closed the door behind him and turned to her. The young man's face was set, with suppressed passion. His hand shook, as he stretched it out toward Moritz, who stood serenely regarding him with a scornful smile.

"It means this," he said, taking a step toward her and speaking in a lowered, but furious voice, "it means that you must give up that man there or me—one or the other.

I don't know what he is to you. I don't know what he would like to be. I don't know what you would wish of him! But I say now, give him up you shall, or I will never see your face again."

"Johann!" exclaimed Elsa, in self-reproach, appeal, and a great fearfulness of what he might further say.

"Good God! Do you think I am made of ice, stone?" he went on, in a burst. "Do you think I can help seeing how with every day that he lives he comes more and more between you and me? Do you think I can endure longer this seeing you grow fonder of him with every breath you draw? Ever since he came back, the thing has gone on and on—no living creature could endure it!"

Elsa, uttering a quick, gasping "Oh," turned very pale. Unable to speak again she sank upon a low chair beside the bedroom door.

"Ah, how happy we were!" the advocate continued, in an accent of mingled anguish and despair. "How happy, until he came here with his accursed music!" The tears came to his eyes as he spoke, eloquent, for once, under his intense feeling. "You love him! You know you love him! I have had to stand by and endure such folly going on from day to day under my very eyes! You will break my heart! Folly? Yes, and a hundred times worse. For *he* does not love *you*. Not he! Ask him if he does. Ask him. You have sacrificed yourself and me for nothing. And I, I have loved you as my life and soul! What can I say? What can a man do?"

The young man's voice failed him. He tried to control himself, to dash away the angry tears that had sprung to his eyes. He choked—was silent—gave a quick glance of wretchedness at the two people so cruelly at the mercy of his words, and then, forgetting his wrath in his suffering,

he pulled open the door at his back and, with a strangled sob, rushed from the room.

Moritz stood in a mingling of confusion and grief, appreciating fully for the first time how matters stood. Elsa had covered her face with her hands. She sat motionless and mute except for low sobs of nervousness and mortification. Moritz trembled; but he approached her side and stood before her perplexed, annoyed, ashamed, guilty.

"Elsa—Elsa," he exclaimed softly, urged by regret and sympathy. She made no reply. He laid his hand gently upon her shoulder. "Can this be true, what this man has just said? Do you indeed think of me otherwise than as a near friend—your brother in art, for whom you have done so much?"

There was yet no answer. Elsa drew herself away, still hiding her face.

"Speak, I beg of you," he said, bending in increasing emotion at her side. "Speak, and tell me that, at least, you do not hate me because I have discovered your secret. What a wretch I must seem to you now!"

Still no answer. He took one of her hands and gently drew it away from her shielded face. Never, until his dying day, did Moritz Reisse forget the look, concentrated for a single instant upon him in that glance from Elsa Ehlert's eyes. It asked the question Johann Steins had rudely bade her ask: and, alas! it answered any he might have put. But she put out her other hand and pointed to the door, drawing that which he held away from him.

He could not endure it another moment. The blood rushed to his face. "Forgive me!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet, "God help us. I do not, I cannot love you. I do not deserve that you should love me. Love in me is

dead, dead. Another woman—she—she has killed it, forever. God bless you. Forget me!"

He turned from her, seized his hat and music-roll from the piano, and left the room.

"Moritz!" cried Elsa. "Moritz!"

The room was empty. No sound met her ears but the renewed tum-tum-tum of the waltzes and the patter of the dancers' feet below. She tottered to the piano. Leaning upon it, she burst once more into suffocating tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Nought but mine eye could have
Persuaded me."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Alexis and the Marshal walked slowly along an avenue from the Singschule and crossed the Park. The silver and shadow of the trees overhead, and the flecks of white moonlight on their path, gave a charming effect.

"A delightful concert to-morrow," said the Marshal presently, "if one may judge from this rehearsal. My kinsman is fortunate in having so accomplished a kapellmeister at his service."

"He undoubtedly is fortunate," replied Alexis. "Reisse is a very superior conductor too—and an excellent-hearted fellow into the bargain."

"You might likewise add, extremely personable," laughed Calenberg. "The female chorus are more apt to keep their eyes upon a leader when he has a face and a figure. Aha, aha, Count von Gravenhorst," continued the veteran, in his early youth something of a campaigning Lothario himself, "what opportunities for conquests among the fair of all classes these musical men do have! Lucky dogs!"

"The world has usually said that of men who wear epaulettes, Marshal," answered Alexis. "Moreover, my friend Reisse has no such youthful follies in his heart; and besides, he says himself he is too busy for them if he had."

"Indeed I am not so sure about that," returned the Marshal. "It seems to me—" he stopped and for a few seconds seemed to be reflecting. Then he exclaimed, as if to himself, "Yes—it must be the same man! What am I thinking of? Look here, Count," he continued; "your friend Herr Reisse was once the hero of a tremendous romance, unless I much mistake—a romance which if only half-true would stamp him a gallant of the first water. You are his intimate friend, I know, and probably share a good many of his secrets. Has Herr Reisse ever spoken to you of some particular occurrences during his life in Italy?"

"In Italy?" responded Alexis, suddenly remarking the fact that Moritz had always been rather reticent as to his stay in that part of the world. At the same time he was highly diverted with the idea of getting hold of something new upon which to rally Moritz, besides the acquaintance with Fräulein Ehlert. "Particular occurrences? I don't know. I think so. What of it, pray?"

"Has he happened to hint at any special amatory experience in that ardent land—eh?" pursued the Marshal, in a more amused tone.

"Not at all," replied Alexis. "He knows how much I enjoy getting wind of anything of that sort with which to stir him up now and then. Not he!"

Calenberg laughed heartily. "You shall be gratified," he said. "When I was last in Italy, some few years ago —three—five—I forget precisely how many it is—I remember that there was current, at least in one circle, a spirited story about him. I had quite failed to connect him again with it until a little while ago. Reisse was in Milan once, you may remember, bringing out one of his operas there. He had time, too, for a most luxuriant intrigue—love-

affair—call it what you please, with the fair daughter of one of our countrymen then travelling in Southern Europe—a peculiar individual of decidedly doubtful caste. I can't give you to-day any of the particulars; they slipped my mind long ago. But at any rate there was billing and cooing, and finally a terrific tempest in a teapot. Either his friend jilted him or else her father discovered the affair. She left the town directly after *something* had happened, bag and baggage—left our composer to get over it as best he could. He must have succeeded in doing it pretty thoroughly by this time, I should say."

Alexis had listened with many ejaculations expressive of lively interest. He burst into a cheerful laugh.

"Oh, Reisse, Reisse!" he exclaimed, when he had recovered his composure, "wait until you are on your artistic dignity again! Wait till you begin to talk to me about 'best friends' and 'refer me to the Brandts for explanations!' Thank you, Marshal. I will bring the color into that dark cheek of his, whether this Italian story has legs to stand upon or not. It shall be my theme, and I will improvise pretty variations on it. And now, seriously, Marshal, do you think that the tale has much truth in it? Who, first of all, were the people? The young lady's name, and her father's, please?"

Old Calenberg answered him more seriously. By this time they had drawn near to the corner of Münsterstrasse. "Well, I am inclined to believe it substantially a fact, Count. The names? Let me see! It is so long ago. Yet I rarely forget a name. Wait—I have it!" he added, after an another moment: "Lillienberg,—Nadine von Lillienberg; and her father that notorious Count von Lillienberg, of Vienna. I forget what became of him."

Alexis turned toward his gossipy companion and looked

at him in the moonlight. He was fairly unable to grasp the meaning of the answer.

"*What* name—did you say—Marshal Calenberg?" he repeated, slowly. He thought that a very disagreeable resemblance in its sound had given him a cruel start.

"Von Lillienberg," returned the Marshal. "I remember the name perfectly now. They were Viennese people—the Count and this only child. The beautiful Contessina Nadina, Milanese society called her. Her father was an evil bird. He was a man of good family, but nearly beggared, and quite too successful a card-player to be an amateur. This daughter he expected to marry to the French ambassador's son, but this affair— Good God! von Gravenhorst!" cried the Marshal, cutting short these particulars abruptly as he looked into his companion's face. "What in the name of Heaven ails you?"

In the moonlight every expression of Alexis' features was perfectly discernible. He had stopped, motionless, on the corner of the street. His teeth were chattering, as if with cold. His breathing was that of a man overcome by some sudden stroke. A clammy perspiration seemed to be oozing out through each pore of his skin. The old Marshal started forward, slipping his arm around his friend to support him.

The gesture and touch brought von Gravenhorst again to his senses. With them came the recollection of an instant necessity for that self-command which was destined, until the end of his life, to stamp this once impulsive young nobleman as a man of no ordinary self-government. He made a nervous motion. His features became more composed.

"I beg your pardon, Marshal," he said, faintly and as if with no extraordinary effort, "I—I do not need your help

—thank you. I have a sudden chill—my third one to-day." He spoke more rapidly. "No, do not, do not trouble yourself, for my house is only eight doors below—I will hurry there at once. Running will do me good. I insist upon your not troubling yourself to accompany me. I shall get to bed at once. Pray accept my apologies."

He turned from the astonished Marshal's side, waving his hand impatiently.

"Forgive my abruptness—good-night—good-night!" he repeated. And before the surprised and sympathizing Calenberg could stir from his statue-like position of surprise, Alexis had hurriedly walked away from him, reached the middle of the near row of stately residences, and was darting up a vestibule.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Calenberg, turning on his heel in by no means good-natured bewilderment. "A chill? I should think so! I never saw a man shake worse, or get to his bed with more ungraceful haste! Those von Gravenhorsts never had any constitutions—or much dignity!" The ruffled veteran pursued his way calmly toward the New Army, now only a square or so distant. As he entered the doors he was finally struck by an idea: "By the sword of Mars! I wonder whether that unlucky story of mine did not join hands with another? Some little love-secret of Gravenhorst's—chill or no chill! I declare I'm sorry I said anything. I guess I'd better not mention the matter to anyone, himself included, again." With which discreet resolution the worthy Marshal entered the club reading-room, and, in the society he sought, forgot very speedily that there was such a person in existence as Alexis von Gravenhorst, the stately old soldier being not only an excellent man, but a superior hand at *écarté*.

Meanwhile, Alexis, his cloak drawn across his shoulders, his whole frame still trembling beneath the tempest of suspicion assailing him, had entered his house. The servant opened the door at the sound of his step. He passed in, with bowed head. Looking neither to the right nor to the left he mounted the staircase and walked into his wife's boudoir. It was in perfect readiness for her arrival the next evening.

From the instant that Calenberg had named the other actors in that Milanese story, and with such exactitude expressed his convictions as to its truth, what hideous, irresistible suggestions had entered the husband's soul with every further word! He appreciated, in the time of a flash of lightning, his wife's taciturnity upon that early visit to Milan with her father. And the delicacy which he had shown toward her history had led him scrupulously to avoid referring to it! He recollected how inexplicable had more than once seemed to him certain recent phases of her conduct toward himself. The existence of a vague understanding between Moritz Reisse and Nadine presented itself, a sudden spectre of torment. Chaotic ideas, held until now in check by his destiny, were at last let loose against his soul. His first resistless impulse, to rush away and be alone, that he might fight off these miserable imaginings, he had obeyed headlong. He had felt that if he listened to Calenberg's voice another instant he would have either cried out and betrayed himself, or fallen into a trance, or gone mad. He could not stop to ask another question. He had heard enough—if all were well; too much, were anything amiss. He scarcely remembered the subterfuge he had employed to rid himself of the Marshal's society, as he lay there now on the low Turkish lounge in his wife's boudoir, alone, save for the menacing shapes of shame and despair and vengeance that circled mistily about him. It

is doubtful if indeed Alexis von Gravenhorst thenceforth remembered any one thing a moment after doing it. The rest of his unhappy life might fairly be called the resistless progress of a human intellect into a dream, each incident of which was fulfilled, then forgotten in the next.

Such quiet, frank natures as his may develop a sort of out-of-hand capacity for suspicion, most explainable by the theory that extremes meet. He remained stretched on the lounge for quite fifteen minutes, recalling what he had just heard—sick, helpless, prostrated. Then came the reaction. "Idiot that I am!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Am I in my senses? To credit a silly story born of some idle lie, passed from lip to lip, this fabrication of some flippant tongues. And to base upon such foolishness —what?" He burst out laughing, almost his old frank laugh. "Nadine and Reisse would scarcely know me! How can I face them after giving a second's harboring to such ideas? Forgive me, both of you," he cried, apostrophizing them with a tear of shame starting to his eyes; "forgive me, my own soul!

He began pacing up and down the room, frowning nervously. "There has been some absurd mistake! I will tell Nadine and Moritz. I will see Calenberg. Old as the stuff is, all shall be sifted to the bottom and nailed now lest it can really revive, to work serious mischief. I was an insane fool not to question Calenberg!"

As he paced about, he brought his hand down in a gesture of displeasure with himself. The movement shook open the breast of his coat. Moritz Reisse's red pocketbook fell to the floor at his feet. The few papers it contained were shaken out. Alexis stooped to replace them. There, before his eyes, lay the letter which his wife had written on the preceding day—the envelope showing bright

and white, with its well-known graceful handwriting plainly legible.

There it lay. At any other time outwardly so innocent! at any other time, the thought at once likely to occur to him that Nadine had written a casual note without mentioning the circumstance! now, now it seemed to fascinate his eyes with a horribly secret guilty significance! He looked down at it very much as a horse starts—and then stands motionless, eying some strange, pallid object in a bridle path. Then he stooped again, stretched forth his hand to pick up the letter—then drew back once more.

He passed his hand piteously across his forehead. Finally he took the letter into his fingers, and slowly opened the pocket-book. His lips were muttering some disconnected words now. A syllable or two of something very like to prayer seemed to be mingled with them. Then he tossed the pocket-book from him, and mechanically unfolding the envelope, drew out the letter. He sat down upon the lounge and read it through. He seemed the statue of a man so doing. He neither moved nor winced, though his face became almost like the face of one dead. He folded the letter up, and let the hand which held it fall upon the cushion.

He sat immovable for a moment or two, upright, as if of stone. His eyes were closed. One could not have seen him breathe. All was intensely still. Downstairs, the five servants that had arrived in the morning from the Lodge had gone to bed. The city without was silent, except for the roll of distant carriages, or a locomotive's shriek.

All at once Alexis sprang to his feet. His face became suffused with blood, a fire seemed to dart from his eyes.

"Curse them!" he cried. "The curse of God be on them both!"

He checked himself at the sound of his own voice. He put out his hand to steady himself against the arm of a fauteuil. By nature capable of too intense feeling to express his agony in words, as he had in all his life been unable to express his love, from that instant he gave little outward evidence of the emotions decreed thenceforth to be his. A new idea possessed him. "There must be others there!" he exclaimed. He caught up two candles from the chimney-piece and stepped quickly into the large dressing-room adjoining the boudoir.

There lay his own portmanteau and trunks, opened and unopened; and two belonging to Nadine. He tried his own keys. They did not fit other locks. He left the room and returned with a hammer and some other implements, forgotten by a workman.

He began to force open the smaller trunk, which he recollected his wife had been singularly careful in packing, and which she had hesitated to send before her with the rest when she decided to defer her departure to B——. The lock finally yielded. He lifted the lid. He paused on taking out at the bottom the writing-case and the jewel-box with which he was familiar. "Don't baulk at your dirty work, *mari complaisant!*" he exclaimed, as he again realized his present occupation. He set the two articles on the floor, and knelt, hesitating, before them. "This first!" he muttered, attacking the jewel-case with a kind of intuition; "the other can come afterward." He succeeded in breaking the lock, after no small trouble. He tossed back the lid as it yielded with a sharp crack. Before him lay the diamonds that had been his wedding gift to Nadine, the enamels and gems he had delighted to lavish upon her in

days of wealth and happiness---now forever over. He lifted tray after tray. He gave a low cry. His instinct had not misled him. Not in the writing-case, but here, thrust down underneath a pile of bracelets, lay a thick small packet—a dozen letters, in his wife's writing, on the thinnest of paper, tied tightly together with a ribbon.

They were the same letters which Moritz Reisse had received from Nadine in Milan, years before, which he had so long preserved, and had read over to himself on that June afternoon; the same that her caution had suggested to her secretly to extract from Moritz's keeping one day when she was not likely to be interrupted in her successful search for them. Although long since she had remorsefully destroyed such souvenirs of her own, appreciating the danger of retaining them, she had rashly preserved these since a week before Moritz's departure from the Lodge, unwilling yet to commit them to the fire. Now they were here, in the hand of her husband, to add any evidence they contained to the truth of the Marshal's statement. Alexis seized them, and laid the packet on the carpet by his side.

After opening and thoroughly satisfying himself as to the contents of the writing case, and acting under a curious mechanical impulse, he began carefully replacing the valuable contents of the jewel-case and closed its broken hasp. With a machine-like hand he continued. Finally he had actually deposited each article in the trunk, just as he had taken it forth, and duly shut down the lid.

"Now!" he ejaculated, rising to his feet with a short, mirthless laugh. "Now, Paris—Helen—Menelaus!"

In the boudoir he opened the packet and read each letter quite through. He was as unmoved outwardly as before; quite as much like a man in a trance; only now he would sometimes pause over some word or phrase and pass his

hand again across his forehead. He finished the last letter and leaned forward. With its fellows, and with that chiefest and latest one of all, the one he had shaken from out the pocket-book, he saw clearly outlined before him a chain of history. Its missing links his own perceptions immediately supplied. He sat there gnawing his lip, his eyes fixed now on the carpet, now on the ceiling, thinking matters out unerringly.

"No, not *then*," he exclaimed, "but afterward—afterward!" Then a change seemed to come. His face was convulsed like the face of a man tied down, to undergo some terrible physical pain. He rose to his feet, holding the last letter in his hand.

"It is true!—it is true!" he exclaimed. He groped, as if a mist darkened his eyes, and then fell, face downward, upon the rug.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history."
As You Like It.

When Moritz Reisse reached his lodgings that evening, after leaving Elsa Ehlert, a second discovery to divert his mind from the bewildering one just affirmed was the loss of the pocket-book. Alarming thoughts of what results might follow this piece of carelessness stunned him. He scarcely shut his eyes that night. In the morning, dreading to show his face to any unknown finder to be met in the street, he hurried at once to the Singschule. He quietly searched, with intense excitement, every corner of the empty building. He reluctantly ventured to question the janitors. It was all to no purpose. He went to old Riemann's lodgings. Riemann's house was closed, and the old doorkeeper had gone with his wife into the suburbs to attend a wedding. There was small reason for Riemann to know anything that might help Moritz—at any rate he thought so; and in the evening, when he entered the Singschule, he saw Riemann's alternate in duty in his post —another vexatious delay.

He was nearly sick with apprehension. He dreaded every ring at the house-bell, every person he encountered in the streets, the advertising columns of the newspaper. If only the pocket-book and its contents might be lost so wholly that no one else would ever behold them! Or if it might have fallen into the hands of some illiterate person

and never be perused by human eye again! But what slender and improbable contingencies were these! How easy for some unknown enemy to employ such a fatal treasure-trove mercilessly against him, and to hold it, like the historic sword, suspended above his guilty head, for any end! Reflections like these made his heart fail within him.

Late in the afternoon, actuated by a resolution that would either be suicidal or afford relief in one important respect, he went to the house in Münsterstrasse, and rang the bell. A man-servant opened the door. His master was extremely busy; had been writing all day alone in his bedroom, refusing to see anyone except (about an hour earlier) some gentlemen from the Bank. Moritz hesitated. Should he or should he not send up his name? A sudden shrinking came over him.

"No, do not disturb him. In fact you need not tell him I called," he said, hastily. "I will see him at the concert to-night."

And, lo! as he crossed the city in the dusk, on his way home, newsmen were busy on all sides because of the failure of the great North-German Trust Company of Berlin; and speculations as to the possible result upon the two large banks of the capital seemed already rife on every corner.

He dressed himself with feverish disquiet, and set out for the Singschule. In the artists' waiting-room, downstairs, he recognized Elsa Ehlert with several others of the singers. She bowed calmly, in response to his hasty salute. He was too uneasy and agitated to be embarrassed. He passed up to his music desk and looked about the beautiful concert-hall.

In spite of any financial anxieties secretly agitating the city, a large and brilliant audience greeted him. He glanced across to the seats where the Waldemars and Alexis

von Gravenhorst and his wife ought to sit. Their places as yet were vacant. As he turned to his music, an usher slipped a note into his hand. It was from Alexis, dated half-an-hour back, and apparently very hurriedly penned. Thus it ran :

"You have heard of the North-German before this. Our Bank cannot stand. Directors P—— and A—— have just set out for the Hague to avoid the storm. I would best go away myself. I shall leave B—— before midnight. Nadine comes direct to me—the carriage will be in waiting—the moment your entertainment is over. She will wish to pack. I have sent a note to her by the same messenger. I understand that the Duke has a reception after the concert. There is no one except yourself to whom I can commit certain matters connected with this sudden step. Please excuse yourself from going to the Residenz, and, above all, pray do so without letting anyone suspect that you are coming to Münsterstrasse. Awkward questions might otherwise be asked you to-morrow when I am out of the way. I can depend upon you. Destroy this.

"A."

Moritz had held his breath as he began to read. He finished with a certain relief. What he had lost had not yet fallen into the least desirable hands—Nadine's letter was still unperused by the eyes of her husband!

"Alexis has not a particle of dissimulation," he said, within himself; "far less than enough to write me such a note as this, if he knew what there is, after all, plenty of chance of his never knowing. Yet, great heavens! how upset must the fellow be! How crushing the effect of this cursed Bank affair, that *he* should be willing to escape,

like a thief, in the night!—willing to hide his upright head until the panic and criticism are over!"

Of mismanagement, no man in B—— would dream of accusing von Gravenhorst, or any member of the Bank direction. The course seemed strange to Moritz, almost inexplicable. He read the note over again, discovering nothing between the lines. He tore it into shreds hurriedly, and put them into his waistcoat pocket. He ran his eye rapidly around the auditorium. Directors P—— and A—— were wont to occupy high seats on such evenings. Neither of them was visible. At the same moment he saw the Waldemars and Nadine taking their seats. Nadine seemed surprised at not finding her husband waiting there. But just then Moritz saw a servant from Münsterstrasse approach her. Nadine took a note from his hand and read it quickly. Her face cleared, and she asked a question or two of the messenger, who departed. Then Moritz saw her again, conversing smilingly with her friends. The Duke and the Court party made their appearance, and the concert began.

Moritz threw himself feverishly into the evening's work. The entertainment was a perfect success. The instant it was over, he hurried out to the lobby to intercept Nadine. He greeted her hastily.

"Your note was from Alexis?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied; "you will come with me at once?"

"As soon as I get rid of His Highness' affair. I must excuse myself," he answered, abruptly, dismissing his scarcely-quieted hesitations as to going to Münsterstrasse at all. "I shall have to put you in your carriage with some other escort. It will be far more safe to join Alexis and yourself half an hour later."

"What on earth does he mean? He talks of some

serious trouble with the Bank," she asked, apprehensively.

"I—I know little more about it than you," he replied. "He will explain to you what he has to me. There is no time for it here. Pray lose none in reaching him."

"I hear that the North-German has failed."

"Yes; that is probably true. Alexis feared it, and you know most of his personal interests are bound up in it. Pray go."

"You will come immediately?"

"Immediately. I must be civil to the Duke," he answered, impatiently.

Nadine assented in some annoyance to this. She seemed hardly to appreciate the force of her husband's injunctions to Moritz to be secret. She was also not a little surprised to find that her maid had not come with the carriage as usual. But Moritz secured an eligible escort in the person of the venerable Court-Physician G——, and hastened to free himself diplomatically from his engagement.

Nadine's horses halted before the door of the house in Münsterstrasse. In the vestibule the great bronze lantern was burning. "No, I will not permit you to alight," said the Countess, much to the relief of the gouty old gentleman. She stepped lightly down, with the footman's aid. "To the residence of Herr G——," she added, to the coachman; "and, after that, you may go to the stables."

She mounted the steps hurriedly and entered the vestibule. "Where in the world can Christian be?" she said impatiently to herself, as she remarked the absence of the servant. But one of the stained-glass doors before her opened. Alexis himself had admitted her.

"Well, my dear, here I am at last!" exclaimed Nadine, "and in a state of thorough mystification and concern. For

Heaven's sake, explain to me the cause of these inexplicable messages which you have sent to Reisse and myself! Your note absolutely petrified me!—with its request to 'hasten home'—that it 'might be necessary for you to leave B—— late this evening'—and I know not what all! And, first, be kind enough to tell me where Lisette, Christian, and Emil are? Has there been a domestic *émeute?*"

"I have permitted them to go to the Postmen's Ball in the Market Building," replied Alexis, fastening the door behind his wife securely, "and Heinrich and Dorothea, you know, cannot return from the Lodge until to-morrow, after my sending them there again to-day."

Nadine let fall the glove she was unfastening by the light of the hall lustre. "My dear Alexis, you are out of your senses. To the Postmen's Ball? and this my first night in our new house! Stop, stop! I see," she continued, throwing her opera-cloak upon a little settle; "it is part and parcel of some unaccountable affair. Come, do explain yourself, chapter and verse—" She interrupted herself, as she raised her eyes to his face. "Great heavens!" she exclaimed, "how frightfully pale you are! Have you been ill? How strange you look as you stand there!"

A distinct change had indeed come over the face of her husband since last Nadine had seen it.

"Hush—pray do not speak so loud," he returned, quickly. "I—I am well enough. Come into the library. I have been impatient for your return. You have heard the news concerning the North-German!"

"I have," replied the Countess. "You do not mean to say that it materially affects your own affairs? or the Bank's?"

"I can explain to you in a very few words what the

failure of the North-German means for me—for both of us," responded Alexis, entering the library before her and walking to the opposite side of the centre-table. "I could not write you. Since I left you, events of the gravest nature have chanced. But, stop!" he exclaimed. "Where is Reisse? Of what was I thinking? Did he not come with you?"

"He will follow shortly," responded Nadine. In growing mistrust she studied her husband's countenance and observed his singular manner. "Court-Physician G—— accompanied me in the carriage. Herr Reisse was obliged to wait to excuse himself to His Highness."

"So much the better!" said Alexis, in a low voice, apparently more to himself than as an answer. He sat down in an arm-chair at hand. "Pray be seated," he said, abruptly; "I had better begin my explanations to *you* at once, before Reisse comes. First of all, then, our Bank will suspend payment to-morrow. Several of the Direction have already fled from the storm. I have decided to follow their example, for it looks, at present, as if the Bank had collapsed forever. It means wreck! The North-German has ruined us."

"Ruined *us!*" exclaimed Nadine, her heart standing still at the notion of such immediate eclipse of all her social glories. "Do you mean by us, you, yourself—you, yourself?"

"Precisely as to my own situation I speak just now," replied Alexis, calmly, keeping his eyes fixed upon his wife's face; "and I must admit to you that the personal consequences to me are likely to be crushing in any case. The exact financial ins and outs I have not time to go into now—need not," he added, impatiently. "I shall certainly have to make great sacrifices to do my duty—put Gravenhorst into market, sell my Berlin property, as well as this

house here—all my landed estate, in fact. If I don't do it voluntarily, I shall be compelled to it, I know. Our way of living must inevitably be very much altered, and that social position of which you are, I know, so justly proud"— here he looked at her keenly, and for the first time bitterness filled his voice—"must suffer great contraction, unostentatiously as we have maintained it."

Nadine looked at him incredulously, and in suppressed anger. The anger gave place to fear. His look, his manner were increasingly unusual. Had sudden calamity weakened his brain ?

"These are—these are strange tidings," she said, making an effort to control her mingled emotions; "strange tidings to welcome me to our new home. But you must not disturb yourself so absurdly, Alexis. You look positively unmanned. Perhaps all will not prove so adverse as would at first seem," she continued. "There must be much that can be saved. There is certainly some way of securing yourself, personally, against such grave loss—"

Alexis checked, by a gesture, so characteristic a suggestion. "Wait, wait an instant," he said, sternly. He had risen and stood beside the table under the chandelier. One hand he held behind him. The other he extended toward her. His eyes were fixed upon her—that same penetrating gaze, his face showing a rigidity now marble-like. "Your advice—advice so natural to you, I may add—comes too late," he replied, coldly. "There is no way now that I could resort to. Pray keep your seat. I have not quite ended. I have another story to tell you, after which I have finished, and will listen to you. There is something else of more importance than the Bank affair."

"What!" exclaimed Nadine, downright fear seizing

her as she looked at him. "Of still greater consequence! It must be—it must be altogether extraordinary, then!"

"To me—yes!" replied he, quickly. "I am not so certain as to you. Let me tell you as quickly as I can. I had once a friend, Nadine; or seemingly a friend, at least—"

Nadine started and opened her eyes wider at this unexpected sentence. Alexis went on:

"—He was young, talented, amiable. I believed him to be a man of honor, although I knew him to be hardly one of strong character to sustain itself under temptation. Too much of the artist-nature entered into him to permit this to be so. I well recollect you yourself," he interpolated, dryly, "sketching one morning a quite parallel type and claiming for the artistic element in it a morally strengthening principle. You do not recall the circumstance? No matter. In an evil hour, my friend chanced to fall under the influence of a woman whom he had known and loved during earlier years. Much, much was his fault—that I do not deny. But reading his temptress, as I afterwards understood her, and knowing him as I knew him, I dare not say how much more fault must have been hers."

He stopped abruptly. His wife was paler than he, now. She sat motionless, with parted lips, her eyes fixed as if by fascination upon his. He leaned over the table. She uttered a cry and started back as if to escape a blow. He had purposed none.

"My story ends suddenly. The rest of it is in writing," he said, bringing his hand from behind him and offering his wife the small packet of letters, as well as her last note to Moritz. "Take those and you have—the rest of it."

She seized them, half springing up, glanced at the writing, and then sank back into her seat. Alexis remained behind the table. With his arms folded, he regarded her with a half-smile, the smile sometimes seen on the faces of death-masks. The clock ticked loudly upon the chimney-piece.

"What have you to say? Or have you nothing?" came his passionless voice upon her ears. "Possibly '*requiescat in pace*'—which was, unless my memory mistakes, your former comment."

Nadine tried to speak. Her lips seemed powerless. Nevertheless, she presently recovered their use, her self-control coming to her aid under the torture of that merciless interrogating gaze. She looked up even defiantly.

"It is all a lie!" she said. "Those letters—that letter—it is all a mistake! I do not—"

Alexis ceased to be stone. He gave a terrible gesture, and took a step to the right of the table. Her courage fled. She started from her chair, and put out her hands before her.

"I was innocent—I was innocent, Alexis—until he came to Gravenhorst," she protested, in sudden confession and terror. "Spare me—have mercy—"

Alexis drew back and resumed his former quiet attitude, with another contemptuous smile flitting across his white face.

"I have no desire to harm you. You will discover soon, I trust, that you are fortunate in having a philosopher as well as a fool for your husband. You certainly have not an assassin." He laughed. "All is precisely as I supposed," he continued, speaking to himself. "And so, listen to me," turning to Nadine, who had overcome her first spasmodic dread of him, and now sat motionless as a

rock—"listen to me. Under these unexpected but, I confess, by no means unique contingencies, there are three things left for you to do. One of them you will do."

"And they are?" she asked.

He intended to reserve one element of the solution he had decided upon as soon as it had suggested itself.

"Continue, by a union merely one in semblance, to keep your good name before the world as my wife. Remain, I say, my wife in name. Share whatever decline in fortune is in my lot. Or else, subject yourself to a veritable separation, under conditions which I shall exact and which we can discuss together later. Or, last of all—" He paused.

"Or last of all?" she repeated, quickly.

"Last of all," Alexis resumed "—and do not waste comments—you may accept my generosity. By that I mean that you may take what money I have in the house here—but it is no considerable sum, I promise you—acquaint your lover with what has occurred, and go from B—— with him now, this night, free, unrestrained, whither you please—leaving me to bear the disgrace and the consequences as I can. I am able to. I will keep my share in the secret, I faithfully assure you. Now, which of these proposals best suits you? I urge the last."

"That is infamous!" she exclaimed, rising to her feet, "infamous! How dare you, Alexis—how dare you suggest so monstrous, so revolting a proposition?"

He regarded her excitement with undisguised scorn. "Infamous? monstrous?" he repeated, mockingly. "Did I not beg you to reserve your comments? I call it a singularly disinterested offer!—amiable, when contrasted with the way husbands conduct themselves in the journals and romances. Treat the matter seriously—and without heroics; for adopt one of these three proposals you in

evitably must. As I said, I rather urge the last one. But pray go or stay, whichever you elect." He shrugged his shoulders in indifference. It is to be doubted whether he was any longer entirely conscious of what he said or did. Alexis von Gravenhorst, jovial, careless, interested in his beautiful estate, secure and proud in the love of his wife and the companionship of his friend, might be said to have died the night before, when, grasping the packet of letters in his hand, he had fallen to the floor of his wife's boudoir, overhead.

Nadine gave a derisive little laugh, the ghost of a laugh. "I will give you no heroics, then," she answered. "I will try to consider your three proposals critically enough to please you. And you may be certain of one thing, Alexis; our play is played out. It has not been a very long play. I neither admit nor deny Moritz Reisse's part in it. I may dissent from your advice now. But stay at your side a day longer than I can help, I will not. My God! how bored, how intolerably bored have I been these months! I wonder you haven't discovered it! Do not think I am likely to let slip the first opportunity that has come to me for an effectual relief? Such men as you—"

"Such men as I?" Alexis repeated. "Well, go on; let me hear your observations on such men as I. They must be valuable and interesting. But, by-the-by, let me ask you, for what reason, in God's name, did you marry such a man as I?"

"Because such a man as you had money and a title—of course," she answered, sharply, leaning upon the back of the chair beside her and surveying him with undisguised cynicism. "You were not my lover. You were my opportunity. Nothing more. I never loved you."

"Indeed!" he said, icily. "I think you speak the truth now."

"No, I never did," she resumed, with audacious frankness. "My early training was not of a sort to teach me to appreciate the moral excellences of your type. Oh, I tell you that to study them day by day, week by week, has given me as much ennui as to sit and look out of my window at some snowy mountain-peak. I abhor winter landscapes. As for—for Reisse—I did love him. Yes. I say it openly to you. I never forgot him, though I had sense enough to see the folly of marrying a man situated as he was, in time to—" She interrupted herself, and murmured something in French.

She had recalled the shattered faculties of Alexis. His forehead contracted. He leaned forward toward her.

"Did you know that it could be nobody else, when I spoke of bringing him to Gravenhorst? I give you the benefit of any shadow of doubt that may be available."

"You need not. I knew it, of course. Certainly."

"You expected the course of things to run about as it has?"

"About as it has," she returned, calmly.

"Then you not only acted, but you premeditated your own share in it?"

"I suppose so." Her indifferent tone plainly was not feigned. "Yes."

"You assume—all your responsibility?"

"I assume—my responsibility—and all his. If he were other than he is I should go further and wish to assume his punishment. But, to tell the truth, I do not think he is worth it. As I now regard him—no—decidedly no."

"Not worth it? And yet you loved him and love him,

and have wrecked yourself and me, your purity, your good-name and mine, for his sake!"

"Yes, in spite of that—or anything else. I am a woman born to love perversely. Even now I love him—oh, yes!—vastly more than I do, or ever could, love you. But then, you see, love with me is a relative term. I am not sure I can *love!*" She half laughed again. "I always knew *he* was not worth it, from some standpoints that I know about just as well as you and the rest of the world, though I may not trouble myself to do much outlooking from them. Moritz Reisse, musician and composer, is at best—well, what he was and is and what his kind are. Let us waste no more time in analyzing him. Your three proposals need all I have. I have dismissed only one choice."

A ringing bell echoed in the hall. "That is—your lover!" he exclaimed. "Admit him yourself. There is nobody else. I leave you. Arrange your plans. When they are decided, come upstairs and inform me of them—*you*," he reiterated. "*His* face I will never willingly look upon again. That alone now I could not well endure."

Alexis turned abruptly and walked noiselessly from the room. She followed him into the hallway. He was mounting firmly the long staircase. She stood at the foot and followed the square-shouldered, manly figure with her eyes.

"Alexis!" she called, obeying some impulse to address him before he quite disappeared.

Alexis halted midway and looked down.

"Remember," came his whisper down to her ears—"your choice!"

He passed around the landing.

CHAPTER XIX.

"The rest is silence."
Hamlet.

With Nadine's unlocking of the door Moritz entered. He started back at the sight of her white face. She put her finger on her lips and beckoned him to the library.

"Alexis knows everything—everything!" came her announcement when once within the room.

Moritz gave a horrified exclamation. "The letter?" he asked, staggering into a seat. His eyes fell upon it lying with the rest upon the stamped leather of the writing-table; the large pocket-book lay beside it. Alexis had placed it there before quitting the library.

"Yes," said Nadine, without giving him time for further ejaculations. "You must have lost that yesterday; and, as you see, I had myself taken these from your keeping before you left us. I beg your pardon. It was a mistake. I am punished. We have not a moment to lose in unnecessary explanations. Listen to me."

"But where is he?" Moritz gasped. He rose to close the door. Before he reached it he leaned against the wall for support. He seemed scarcely to possess the power to stand. For a moment there was silence. "Where, I say, is Alexis? How comes it that—"

Nadine interrupted him. She had already determined to mislead him as to the course she had within these few minutes half resolved upon. What was so wise, since the certainty of her husband's ruined finances and the end of her brilliant social career were manifest? There was another alternative besides those Alexis had held out.

"I say, wait! Listen to me," she resumed, impatiently.

He obeyed in trembling confusion and unmanly terror. She uttered some hasty sentences. A sudden sound checked her.

"What was that?" she exclaimed.

"I heard nothing," he answered.

Nadine hurried past him, out of the library, and stood listening an instant in the hall. What she had heard she was sure came from the conservatory.

"I will be back in an instant. Stay here," she whispered. "Somebody—somebody is in the conservatory. I heard a sash dropped."

He obeyed her, and stood still on the threshold. Nadine ran softly the length of the hall, pushed aside the portiere, and opened the door. Within the conservatory, one of unusual size, the moon poured its full radiance. Bordered by a narrow walk of white gravel and masses of giant-ferns and palms was a little grass-plot, with a fountain, crowned by a statue, in the centre. Something that she saw, as her eyes glanced about seeking the figure of a servant or watchman, made her utter another exclamation. The portiere fell together behind her. She had gone further forward into the now still conservatory. Moritz left his post and followed her. From the steps he saw her kneeling in the middle of the grass-plot, beside the fountain with its tall statue of Truth. A long, dark object lay before her, over which she was crouching. Moritz took some trembling steps—aghast at picturing *that*—yet suspecting it, and came to her side.

"What—what—who is it?" he asked.

Alexis lay there—dead. One hand, still warm, retained the weapon he had just discharged. His other hand held some white objects—two letters. He had ceased to

breathe. His regular, harmonious features, not disfigured by a wound that had been instantly fatal, were upturned. His lifeless eyes, wide open, seemed to stare upward into the face of Truth, and on through the clear glass of the roof, into the radiant night-sky.

Horrified beyond expression, Moritz uttered a cry, and then gasped as the certainty of what was before him became clear. "Alexis! Merciful God! he is dead—dead! He has killed himself!" he repeated.

Nadine turned to him, half rising. "Yes—he is dead," she said, in a tone of angry bewilderment that contained no particular accent of grief. "And—and you and I—we live."

He would have touched Alexis' wrist. Nadine leaned forward and struck away his hand from that of the dead.

"Neither must *I* touch him!" she exclaimed, in an awed voice. "Get up! Follow me quickly."

Moritz obeyed. As they turned a rose in her hair was loosened. It fell, striking the dead man sharply on the mouth. She put her hand to her head—noticed the flower fallen, but did not offer to move it. The rose slipped from Alexis' lips to the moss. The crimson petals stained themselves a deeper crimson by that in which they now rested. It was an allegory.

Moritz followed her from the spot. She remounted quickly the stone steps. They stood in the library again. Then he noticed that she held in her hand the letters she had taken from the hand of Alexis. Moritz looked over her shoulder as she read, holding them tightly in her wax-like fingers. The first seemed to be but a blank card, unenclosed. On it was written in a firm hand:

"To Paris and Helen. I am true to my philosophy.

Do you remember it? 'Menelaus kills himself.' Destroy this with the rest. You are secure."

The second was a sheet in an envelope, unsealed. It was directed to Nadine:

"I cannot face poverty and give up Gravenhorst. The ruin of the Bank is my ruin. A. von G."

Nothing more. Not an allusion, not a syllable, betraying the shameful secret of false wife and false friend, which alone had brought him to this end. No maledictions, not even a reproach! Both letters, unquestionably, had been prepared hours before, in quiet readiness for the event—in strange self-sacrifice as well as in unspeakable bitterness of spirit.

Nadine drew in her breath sharply. She threw the second letter down. "Quick!" she exclaimed, "give me those yonder! Each one. Be careful! He is right! Our secret is safe—it is safe, thanks to him."

She pushed the other letters and the note addressed "To Paris and Helen" into the grate, where a few embers still smouldered. She held a candle beneath them. In a moment all were ashes. She rose and turned again to Moritz.

"Look!" she said, pointing to them. "I say with him, our secret is safe! Do you not understand? For your sake, I am not sorry! This other letter I will replace. Now listen to me. Did any soul know of your coming here to-night?"

"No," he replied, tremblingly. "I do not think it possible anyone could. I obeyed his wish—

Nadine interrupted him. "Very good!" she continued, hurriedly. "You must quit this house at once! The servants cannot return for an hour or so yet. In any

event, this—unexpected thing can hardly become known to any, except us two, before morning."

"Quit this house now!" he cried. "You are mad! Lost we may be! Lost, then, we will be together! I have borne my part; I will bear it still. What will you do? In spite of this letter here, in spite of the destruction of those yonder, there will be examinations. You will be interrogated, I shall be—"

"Evidently you are not thinking of what you say," she returned, looking calmly into his blanched face and terrified eyes. "I see, at least, if you do not, how all has been provided for, taken into consideration, by him. I cannot stop now to discuss it. One thing only is an absolute necessity. You must go at once, without losing an instant. Oh, once more, I beg you to trust everything to me! I tell you, I foresee all that must be done. I am fully equal to it. You would hinder, not help. Your presence will ruin all. Have you lost confidence in my resources?" she added, irritably. "For what reason, pray? I will find means of communicating with you to-morrow, I tell you. Go! Go! Another moment here, and you may undo yourself and me!"

Bewildered, mute, Moritz nodded his head. He seized the recovered pocket-book, concealed it safely in his cloak, and hurried behind Nadine through the hall.

"Wait—be careful of your shadow on the door," she whispered, as the light fell upon him. She looked at him as he drew his cloak around him. Their eyes met an instant—for the last time.

"Gas-light and alarm are curiously unbecoming to you," she said; and then added, mockingly, "and—and—your eyes seem to accuse me as the most to blame for all this. Eh?" He said nothing, and fumbled with his glove. "Well—

I once expected to combat such a charge, and successfully. But now it seems scarcely worth while, after all. Let it pass. As you will!" He placed his hand upon the door. "You will hear from me early to-morrow," she added. "Have no fear—though the artist-temperament allows a man to fear."

Nadine bolted the doors noiselessly at his back. Moritz glided down the black side of the street, and, meeting no one, safely crossed the Park. He gained his own lodgings unrecognized.

Reisse gone, Nadine slowly returned to the library. Thank Heaven, no sign of the servants yet, nor likely to be any! Her nervous strength was almost at an end—but she must make its remnant suffice for what she had to do—and would do. She sat down exhausted, haggard, in an arm-chair by the door. She did not weep now, any more than a little while earlier. Her dry eyes seemed aware of no material objects in front of them. Once or twice she clasped and unclasped her fingers, as if in the abstraction of some supreme and concentrated reflections, and a deep line came between her eyes. Some moments passed thus. Then an exclamation, and once more a note of scornful laughter escaped her lips. "No use!" she ejaculated.

She rose with a start, hurried about, extinguished the lights, and shut the door behind her. She went softly upstairs. Ten minutes later she descended. All the time she had held in her hand the one letter remaining of the two Alexis had written. She put out the hall chandelier, first glancing at her face and toilette in the mirror beside the clock and arranging a stray lock of her wonderful hair. The clock was just upon the stroke of eleven. She drew her white cloak about her, glided to the conservatory door, and passed within, closing it carefully after her.

CHAPTER XX.

"Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep and not an ear open."

Winter's Tale.

The next morning B—— was electrified with the news of the suspension of the Bank. An hour later succeeded the shocking intelligence that Count Alexis von Gravenhorst, so largely interested in the concern, had taken his own life in consequence of its downfall, and that his beautiful wife, the Countess Nadine, arriving home late from the concert of the preceding evening (and undoubtedly losing her reason at the discovery), had poisoned herself, alone, in the empty dwelling. The body of the Countess was discovered lying beside that of her husband. In his hand was a letter he had directed to her, signed "A. von G.," declaring his motive for committing his desperate act.

There was an immediate investigation. But nothing further was developed. The melancholy affair seemed quite explainable by explicit testimony from the dead. A couple of visitors from the Bank in the morning, and the servants busy about the house throughout the day, also bore witness to Alexis' strange appearance and manner during the last twenty-four hours of his life.

Moritz Reisse was not even summoned officially to throw any light upon matters. It was made plain that he had not even seen his unhappy friend after the rehearsal in the Singschule, when von Gravenhorst stood at his side,

alert and cheerful, evidently as yet unacquainted with the extent and certainty of his approaching financial ruin. Even old Riemann's vague interrogations as to the return of the pocket-book were satisfied by a reply from Moritz himself. As to the jewel-case, broken-locked but unrifled, Nadine von Gravenhorst's voluble maid "perfectly remembered" (and described) an accident of a day or so earlier apparently explaining that matter satisfactorily.

Marshal Calenberg, true to his resolution, breathed no syllable of his own disagreeable suspicions, out of respect for the honor of the young nobleman whom he had known and admired, as he had his father before him. Some years later the Marshal became tolerably assured, from certain accidental discoveries elsewhere, that some of his surmises at the time had been more or less correct. Nevertheless, he always held his peace. Elsa Ehlert, who possibly divined matters better than anyone else, likewise kept her lips sealed forever.

She never saw Moritz Reisse again, except in passing. Reisse did not go to Berlin that winter. Immediately after the tragedy he quitted B——, apparently overcome by the frightful conclusion of his friendship with the von Gravenhorsts. He seldom spoke of them. He returned to southern lands and came north no more, forwarding the score of his "Paris and Helen" to the Intendant in Berlin, and breaking that part of his contract which called for its production under his own personal supervision. In consequence of this change, certain difficulties arose relative to bringing it out. They ended in the consigning of the opera score to the dusty shelves of the Opera, and Elsa Ehlert made her appearance in a work from another pen. Some years later, the autograph and only MS. of "Paris and Helen" was accidentally burnt, with some worthless material, in a private library; and thus no one ever again heard a note of the genuine masterpiece that Moritz Reisse wrote during the summer of 185— at Gra-

venhorst. Reisse found Dresden and Munich altogether convenient and pleasant refuges. He went, later, down into Italy again.

For a time, it is true, he was seen little in fashionable society. Some watchful persons noted that there hung about his manner not only the depression of one to whom a tragedy has come very near, but a restlessness and an odd, nervous apprehension, not shaken off during many months. However, this quite passed during the following summer, when Moritz's intimacy in Switzerland with the well-known Dalmatian actress, Renata V——, was warmest. This year and the two years following proved to be his most brilliant ones as a composer. His powerful opera "Vathek," emphatically of the advanced school of modern operatic writing, and hardly second to his "Paris and Helen" as a score; his dramatic yet profoundly devout oratorio "Golgotha" (dedicated, by-the-bye, to the lovely Renata); his "Adriatic Symphony," and the remarkable Mass in A, followed each other with cumulative successes. Those who saw most of him often commented upon the lack of anything in Reisse's personality, intellectual or moral, suggesting the elevation and force of his finer work. But that riddle is not new. Shortly after conducting some special performances of "Vathek" in Venice, Moritz was spoken of in German musical circles as having betaken himself to Rome, giving himself out as disinclined to do any composing for a while; and presently there was a report abroad that he had grown unwisely fond of the wine-bottle. It was in Rome, nevertheless, that he considered as the subject for a sacred opera—"Salome;" but he must have written little or nothing on it. At length there reached Elsa Ehlert's ears only vague and anything but creditable accounts of him. But one day her glance fell on a paragraph in a newspaper, in which it was reported that Herr Moritz Reisse, the dis-

tinguished composer, had been accidentally drowned at Bellaggio. The story proved true. Such was the end of the composer of "Prinz Max" and "Paris and Helen."

Elsa Ehlert sang throughout the length and breadth of Germany and Austria, and made for herself a wide reputation with the German-speaking public—now only recalled by the oldest generation of opera-goers or through the pages of musical dictionaries. As may be supposed, she gradually became profoundly interested in the genius and troubled career of Richard Wagner; and to two or three analytical discussions which Wagner and she had happened to have one summer at a Kur Wagner often referred, in alluding to the rôles which had been their topic. Her stage-life, however, was concluding, just as the period of Wagner's general triumph approached. Moreover, Fräulein Ehlert once chanced to hear a young singer in Vienna, in a light-opera part, and was curiously impressed with her voice. She asked to be presented to Fräulein Amalia Materna. "You ought to go very far in art, my dear," she said, earnestly. "There is the same stuff in your voice and artistic nature of which are made the Schroeder-Devrients and Johanna Wagners. We shall see—though, by-the-bye, I may not be here to applaud you." Her prediction was true.

She never married. The world knew that many an honorable and wealthy alliance was tendered her. But no—she moved through her brief career calm, passionless, save when on the stage, apparently an artist whose heart was incapable of loving anything except her art. And so she always said. She died in Styria, a few years ago, while visiting some old friends, having wholly retired from professional life.

She rarely sang in the "Prinz Max," as it grew older. It no longer suited her voice, she said; and, long ago, her rôle of *Zatime* passed into oblivion with the rest of Reisse's

opera. Its score, now mute forever, is to-day in the autograph collection of a well-known and wealthy amateur of Leipsic.

A year before Elsa left B—— for the last time she heard of the marriage of her former lover, Johann Steins, to his once relentless opponent, Bertha Grauschimmel. Such revenges upon opinion and circumstance doth the whirligig of time bring in!

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